



# CHANDI PURANA

## A GODDESS GOES TO WAR

Sarala Das

Edited by  
Udayanath Sahoo

Translated by Basant Kumar Tripathy



## CHANDI PURANA

Based on the legend of Durga's incarnation of Chandi, as narrated in the *Vishnu Purana*, Sarala Das's *Chandi Purana*, written in Odia, marks the beginning of the era of classical Odia literature. It is not, however, just a renewed vernacular edition of an old story told in Sanskrit long ago; its objective is to communicate one of the great themes of Indian mythology to the common folk whom myth marginalizes and history excludes. And in doing so, the poet administers certain changes, based on local religions, beliefs, and customs. He introduces the Odia legend of Chandi by interpreting her as Sarala Chandi of Kanakpur, Odisha, where she has been 'worshipped for one lakh and thirty-two thousand years of Kaliyuga'. Second, in Sanskrit texts, the story is told by Sage Medha to King Suratha and Samadhi Vaisya. In *Chandi Purana*, Sage Shuka is the narrator and King Parikshit is the listener, which reflects the poet's adherence to Vaishnavism.

Essentially, a war story, it presents Durga not only as a goddess in war, but also as a mother figure who tears apart the patriarchal frame in which women are treated as subordinates.

Indigenous and secular, the *Chandi Purana* is a shastra for laymen, a bold step towards fulfilling their right to knowledge.

**Sarala Das** (15th century) A shudra by caste and a farmer by occupation, Sarala Das was a great devotee of Sarala Chandi whom he considered his mother and his guide throughout his literary career. The poet of common man, he wrote epics such as the *Bichitra Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Chandi Purana* which immortalized him.

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SARALA DAS

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*Translated by*

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*with an introduction by*

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## Foreword

Adikabi Sarala Das Chair of Odia Studies started its activities at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) with the financial help of Government of Odisha from 26 December 2017 in the Centre of Indian Languages (CIL), School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies (SLL&CS). The Chair intends to represent Odisha, its language, literature and culture in all its multilingual and pluralistic manifestations. The Chair encourages comparative studies across a wide range of domains and also aims at disseminating knowledge of Odia language, literature and culture both at the national and international levels.

After the successful launch of the translation of *Bichitra Ramayana*, a fifteenth-century classic, in 2020, we are now bringing out our second ambitious project in print, the English version of the *Chandi Purana*, composed by Adikabi Sarala Das in Odia language. It retells one of the greatest themes of Indian mythology dealing with the heroic exploits of Goddess Durga — how she outwitted and eliminated the demon king Mahisasura and his powerful commanders. The battle between Durga and Mahishasura is considered to be more violent and more



destructive than those of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which is elaborately narrated in texts such as the *Durga Saptasati*, the *Kalika Purana*, the *Markandeya Purana*, *Devi Bhagavata*, the *Vishnu Purana*, etc. Referring to the source of his work, Sarala proclaims: I'm narrating to you the *Vishnu Purana* which is the essence of the *Bhagavata*.

Sarala's literary excellence, however, does not lie in producing the Odia version of a story of the long past written in Sanskrit. His objective is three-fold: (1) to create a habitation of knowledge by converting, rather subverting the subject to accommodate the local religious beliefs and customs, (2) to transmit the new knowledge system to the common folk whom he is writing for by using legends and folklore and (3) to break free from the Sanskrit – Prakrit tradition and reset it into an indigenous literary culture.

In *Chandi Purana*, Durga is equated with Sarala Chandi of Kanakapur in eastern Odisha. She is said to be the daughter of the first Brahma, Krupajal. Banished by her father for a minor offence she took shelter in Chandrabhaga (near Konark) bearing the name Hingula and later she came to Kanakapura where she is being worshipped as Sarala Chandi for thousands of years. She conforms to the Odia legend of Chandi and one of Vishnu's incarnations. Second, in all other texts the retelling of the story of Durga is conducted by Sage Medha for the benefit of king Suratha and Samadhi Vaishya who had been turned out of their respective positions by those whom they loved best. Sarala changes the narrator and the listener and turns the affair of retelling to an elaborate conversation between Sage Shuka and king Parikshit. Here Sage Shuka retells the story to king Parikshit, who, under a curse, is bitten by Takshaka and waiting for his imminent death. Here Durga is not only

a Vaishnavi, but also one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. We see the goddess sitting on the Vindhya giri with a veil over her head, which is a typical picture of a village woman in Odisha. She is portrayed less as a goddess and more as a symbol of eternal womanhood.

First, to bring the subject within the domain of the local religion, Sarala adopts the theories of subversion and mutation. Sanskrit, however, is not a unified language and the texts written in it cannot be called standardized ones as there might be many texts on the same subject in other languages, nearly as old as Sanskrit. Therefore, there is always a space for modification and variation, a space for intertextuality. Sarala Das declares himself as an unschooled Shudra farmer who has no access to the world of *shastras*. He owes a deep sense of gratitude to Sarala Chandi, who, as he says, used to narrate the *shastras* to him during her nightly visitations, which he puts in words as soon as the Sun rises. His unflinching devotion to her is expressed when he says, 'I'm Sarala Das, son of Sarala Chandi/Krupajal's daughter.'

Sarala's presentation of Durga's character and conduct is not based on her role as a goddess or as a warrior only; more than anything else, he views her as a graceful woman of the earth, sometimes a symbol of 'Indian femininity'. She adds new dimensions to the war story, which is the man-woman relationship. She explains herself '... we are not the kind of women you think us to be. As mother/we bring you to the earth; as wives/we spend nights with you; as Kalika we kill you/and, as fire, we burn you after you die/you've beginning and end, but we've only the middle/we create and destroy.' In an answer to Mahisa's commanders who treat women with slights and barbs, she passes a note of caution, saying, '... we

represent/ the eternal motherhood; we're yoginis/ the symbols of purity'. It is the sight of her nakedness that brings an end to Mahisa's life, not the weapons.

Second, to communicate the new knowledge system to the common folk, Sarala administers legends and folklore into the text. It is well known that Durga is born from the fire emanated from the anger of the panicked gods who have been driven away from their heavenly abode by Mahisasura. Her forehead was made by Brahma's fire, face by Narayan, teeth by Maheswar, eyes by fire, nose by Indra, radiance by Aditya, tongue by moon, cheeks by Yama, chest by Kuber, armpit by Nirakar, navel by Sanaka, folds on her abdomen by Ashwini Kumar, thighs by Prajapati, feet by Ananta Vasuki, toes by nine planets and Bhruhu, fingers by *Kunda* buds, back by Hemavanta, hair by stars, belly by Varuna, water in her body by Rain, one thousand hands by forty-nine winds, words by Yama and holiness by Vaishnavas. After she emerged from fire, some of the gods offered her weapons, others clothes and ornaments. Peculiar enough, Sarala adds two more contributors, one from the human world, another from the kingdom of animals. Arundhati teaches the goddess the *gauri sauri* method of cooking (cooking without cutting the vegetables and adding no spices). The idea behind it may be to make the goddess's life as a woman complete. Second, the pangolin offers the goddess its skin, too thick to penetrate. Another example of innovation is that Sarala portrays Arundhati as the daughter of a *chandal* whom Basistha marries under duress. Under the spiritual influence of Basistha, she later becomes one of the deities of heaven. The upward mobility of the low born shows Sarala's social concern. His message here is loud and clear that caste does not determine one's position in the society.

Sarala wrote during a period, when Odia language did not have an independent identity; it was reeling under the influence of Sanskrit and Prakrit. It was only during his time that Odia became the state language and received the patronage of Odia kings. Sarala's works reveal a continuous effort by the poet to break from the Sanskrit-Prakrit tradition and form an indigenous literary culture. He tried to give a distinct shape to the native language, not only by writing for the natives, but also by expressing his thoughts with the language they spoke. The folk elements in his works are plenty, bringing his art closer to the readers.

In localising the master text, Sarala breaks the *shastrik* and *brahmanical* mould of the earlier texts and forms a new kind of literature that is indigenous, secular and democratic. He was the first poet to take Odia language from orality to literarization. His works such as the *Bichitra Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Chandi Purana* usher in a new age as the first epics written by an unschooled Shudra poet of the fifteenth century. He imbued his works with the hopes and aspirations and the way of life of the commoners. He set new cannons which went a long way in developing Odia literature. He deliberately calls his work *Purana*. He specified the genre to ground readers' expectations at the outset, that a reader should expect a local *Chandi Purana* and not merely a work of translation or imitation.

On this occasion I express my sincere thanks to Prof. Basant Kumar Tripathy for undertaking the translation of this landmark volume into English and to Dr. Urmishree Bedamatta for providing us with a brilliant piece of Introduction. I am also thankful to Sri Ajay Kumar Jain of Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi for taking the onerous task of

publishing the translation of the classical text of Odia literature jointly with Adikabi Sarala Das Chair of Odia Studies at CIL/SLL&CS, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

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A Goddess Goes to War:  
Claiming the Right to Modesty  
*An Introduction to the  
Odia Legend of Chandi*

The young modern reader of the Odia *Chandi Purana* (ChP henceforth) is far removed from the empirical, social and imaginative realm of its author Sarala Das, so much so that the distance might lead to a catastrophic misunderstanding of the actual nature of the text. What kind of modern reader do we wish to imply? A brilliantly creative reader<sup>1</sup> who looks for stories to retell and wants to be read? Is it a scholar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> My reference is to Anuja Chandramouli, the author of *Shakti: The Divine Feminine* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2015). Chandramouli's book provides a witty insight into the complex character of women and enjoys a wide appeal among young readers.

<sup>2</sup> Such scholars are numerous but some noteworthy names are Thomas B. Coburn, Cheever MacKenzie Brown, J.A.B. van Buitenen, M. Haraprasad Shastri, R.C. Hazra, F.E. Pargiter, Ludo Rocher, and P.V. Kane, who continue to be cited by contemporary scholars of Puranic literature. The *pancalaksana* of *sarga* (stories about the origin of the universe), *pratisarga* (dissolution of the universe and its recreation), *vamsa* (genealogies of devas, asuras, rishis and kings), *manvantara* (a cosmic cycle of Creation which is

whose preoccupation is the study of the five identifiers (*pancalaksana*) of the Puranic genre of literature and the incongruences in this body of literature? Such scholarly work has yielded one important observation though, that although the subject of Purana is ancient, it is still new.<sup>3</sup> Is it a scholar<sup>4</sup> whose preoccupation is the study of Puranas as

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presided by a Manu, the progenitor of mankind), and *vamsanucharita* (stories of the rise and fall of clans and dynasties) which were posited for the first time by Amarasinha (fifth-sixth centuries) in *Amarakosa*, may be taken as broad identifiers, for scholars have not been able to identify any extant Purana except the *Vishnu Purana* and the *Bhagavata Purana* which completely satisfy these conditions. In this context, see Stephan Hillyer Levitt, 'A Note on the Compound *Pancalaksana* in Amarasinha's *Namalinganusasana*', in *Purana*, vol. XVIII, no. 1, Varanasi: Bulletin of the Purana Department, All India Kashiraj Trust, 1976: 5–38). Sarala Das's *Chandi Purana* has only *vamsa*. Important scholarly works on the *pancalaksana* include R.C. Hazra's 'The Aswamedha, the Common Source of Origin of the Purana Panca-Laksana and the Mahabharata', in *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol. 36, no. 4, Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1955: 190–203 and Willibald Kirfel's *Das Purana Pancalaksana* (Bonn: Kurt Schroeder, 1927). For a history of scholarship on the *pancalaksana*, see Ludo Rocher, 'Puranam Pancalaksanam in "The Puranas"', 24–30', in Jan Gonda (ed.), *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. II, Fasc. 3, Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> It would be helpful to do a simultaneous reading of F.E. Pargiter's *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), and Giorgio Bonazzoli's 'The Dynamic Canon of the Puranas', in *Purana*, vol. XXI, no. 2, Varanasi: Bulletin of the Purana Department, All India Kashiraj Trust, 1979: 116–66. While Pargiter argues that a history of ancient India ought to be built not only on the Vedas and Vedic literature but also on the Puranic and epic tradition, Bonazzoli explains the origin and evolution of the Purana tradition itself. For a very brief overview of Puranas, see R.C. Hazra's 'The Puranas', in Haridass Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1962: 246–7).

<sup>4</sup> Of relevance in this area of scholarship are Rachel Fell McDermott's *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kali and Uma from Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford

sectarian manifestos of religion and rituals? Such approach makes us think of a casing as Sakta literature for ChP alongside other texts such as Bana's *Candisataka*, *Devi Mahatmya*, *Devi Bhagavata Purana* and *Kalika Purana*.<sup>5</sup> Yet others, inspired by methods of textual criticism, have sought to focus on the historicity of the Puranas,<sup>6</sup> a debate yet to be settled with any

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University Press, 2001) and Hillary Rodrigues's *Ritual Worship of the Great Goddess: The Liturgy of the Durga Puja with Interpretations* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003). *The Magic of Kali. Encountering Kali* (California: University of California Press, 2003), a book edited by Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal helped me get a bird's-eye view of multicultural perspectives on the Goddess Kali. Stella Kramrisch's 'The Indian Great Goddess', in *History of Religions*, vol. 14, no. 4, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975: 235-65 recounts certain myths of the Goddess to show the polyvalence in the image of the great Goddess. David Kinsley's *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998) dwells on the different archetypal but 'forbidden' forms of the devi which awaken aspects of our consciousness.

<sup>5</sup> My point of emphasis here is the Sakta corpus in both Sanskrit and Bhasha traditions. David Shulman does a reading of the Tamil versions of the Mahisamardini story in 'The Murderous Bride: Tamil Versions of the Myth of Devi and the Buffalo-Demon', in *History of Religions*, vol. 16, no. 2, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976: 120-46.

<sup>6</sup> For debates in this regard, I have depended on A. Berriedale Keith's 'The Age of the Puranas', in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914: 1021-32 and 'Dating the Puranas', in Ludo Rocher's, *The Puranas*, Connecticut: American Oriental Society, pp. 100-3. As far as the origin of the image of Mahisamardini (the slayer of Mahisa) is concerned, iconography research dates it as far back as the Kusana period (first to fourth century; in this context, see J.C. Harle's 'On a Disputed Element in the Iconography of Early Mahisasuramardini Images' in *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 8, The Smithsonian Institution and the Department of the History of Art, University of Michigan 1970: 147-53'. The earliest textual representation of the image perhaps is Banabhatta's *Candisataka* (seventh century) which G.P. Quackenbos says, is 'alleged to be a rival poem to the *Suryasataka*' which was written by the Sanskrit poet Mayura (see 'Preface', in *The Sanskrit Poems*



degree of finality. And, of course, given the title of the text, there has been enough stretching to emphasize its feminist or anti-feminist implications.<sup>7</sup> It would be worthwhile, then, to draw the young modern reader to the evocative power of *ChP* actualized through imagery, meaning and emotion.<sup>8</sup> However, it would not be easy to get such a reader interested in the text unless it speaks to individual concerns about the scope and possibility of making life choices under specific conditions.

*ChP* is an original abridgement by Sarala Das who, in full awareness of the 'Puranic spirit',<sup>9</sup> rearranges and adapts the most popular story of the devi's killing of Mahisasura, which is part of the traditional subject matter of Sakta literature, within a Vaishnava framework as is clear from its structure as a dialogue between the great sage, Shuka, and King Parikshit.

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of *Mayura*, p. vii, NY: Columbia University Press, 1917). About the historical context, Krushna Charan Sahoo, the Odia compiler and editor of Sarala Das's *Chandi Purana*, which is the source text of this English translation, makes use of Mahisa's fight with Durga's troop of *dakinis* and *chandis* who are thrown all over the place, to allude to the destruction wreaked by Mughal invaders who went on a rampage destroying idols (p. 82). A similar observation is made by Kumkum Chatterjee: 'During the period of the Mughal conquest of Bengal, the imperial military machine was represented as a monster whom the Goddess Chandi, symbolizing Bengal's regional culture, had to vanquish', p. 1435; see 'Goddess Encounters: Mughals, Monsters and the Goddess in Bengal', in *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 5, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013: 1435–87.

<sup>7</sup> Such framing is a result of my reading of the essays in Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (eds.), *Is the Goddess a Feminist?: The Politics of South Asian Goddesses* (New York: NYU Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> This approach was vaguely but strongly inspired by a reading of Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. from German (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> Coburn explains it as 'the spirit of multiformity and tolerance' (p. 346). Thomas B. Coburn, 'The Study of the Puranas and the Study of Religion', in *Religious Studies* vol. 16 no. 3, 1980: 341–52.

The rearrangement and adaptation have a divine sanction because it is the devi who instructs the poet during her nightly visitations. *ChP*, therefore, is *sruti* literature in which an old story makes a renewed appearance and will continue to appear in the imagination of any human conscious of existential challenges. Consequently, there may never be a retelling which is logically superior. Because of its structure as a dialogue between Shuka and Parikshit, native scholars<sup>10</sup> of *ChP* have seen it mostly as derived from *Devi Bhagavata*, in which devi is seen as a manifestation of ultimate reality (Brahma). Perhaps rightly, because unlike the *Devi Mahatmya*<sup>11</sup> which mostly argues that all women embody qualities of devi, the *Devi Bhagavata* is more forthcoming about the complex nature of women as is in *ChP*. However, the metaphysical aspect of the devi, has often been used as a tool to propagate feminist ideologies of power and domination. But while the metaphysical aspect rarely helps the modern reader with material and worldly concerns to appreciate the relevance of a text as *ChP*, the feminist ideological position threatens to reduce the text to a

<sup>10</sup> My reference is only to Krushna Charan Sahoo, who has edited Sarala Das's *Chandi Purana*, which was published by Books and Books (Cuttack) in 1984. The English translation is of this text. My observation is also based on my reading of Cheever Mackenzie Brown's *The Triumph of the Goddess: The Canonical Models and Theological Visions of the Devi-Bhagavata Purana* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> For an extensive account of the contents of *Devi Mahatmya* and its sociological implications, I have referred Cynthia Humes's 'Is the Devi Mahatmya a Feminist Scripture?', in Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (eds.), *Is the Goddess a Feminist?*, pp. 123–50. I began entering the text of *Chandi Purana* with the help of Thomas Coburn's *Devi Mahatmya: The Crystallization of a Goddess Tradition* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), and Cheever Mackenzie Brown's *The Triumph of the Goddess*. The *Devi Mahatmya* of *Markandeya Purana* is commonly believed to be the earliest account of Durga's slaying of the buffalo demon.

simplicistic narrative about the superiority of the feminine, which, in turn, has given rise to debates about the gender of transcendent consciousness. Puranic texts on the devi represent femininity which is outside the ordinary and therefore, have transformed her into an object of awe and worship. However, it is the worldliness which resonates in the devi's manifestation as Chandi that makes *ChP* irresistible.

Sarala Das calls his composition variously as *Vishnu Purana*, *Sri Bhagavata* and *Chandi Purana*. The exordium gives the purpose of the narration which is embedded in the desire expressed by Parikshit, who was on the verge of death, having been bitten by the snake king Takshak, to hear *Vishnu Purana*. Chandi is a Vaishnavi who has been through many lives as Narmada Saraswati, the daughter of the creator Krupajal. As Saraswati, she was guilty of a minor offence and hence had to live in exile as the village Goddess Hingula at the holy site of Chandrabhaga in Odra rashtra. Later, she shifted to Kanaka, Parshuramapatana, where she has been worshipped as Sarala Chandi for 1,32,000 years of Kali Yuga. It is she, Katyayani, who instructs the poet during her nightly visitations to write and thus Sarala Das's *ChP* acquires authority within a particular locale.

Whatever she dictates me during her nightly  
Visitation, I write it down as soon as  
The sun rises.

Through a quick genealogical account of the demonic clan and how the earth came to acquire demonic attributes, Shuka makes a deliberate arrival at the primaeval male desire for a woman. But it is the malevolent sexual desire of Kapilasingha that kick-starts the story. By a boon granted by Shiva, the demon king Kapilasingha had been empowered by 'enormous

sexual desire to seduce women'. Frightened by his oppressive sexual behaviour, Kapilasingha's wife Dharmarekha escaped to Singhala where she took refuge as a buffalo in disguise. Yama's carrier, the buffalo Krtantaka was in Singhala and overpowered by desire, it chased Dharmarekha and ravished her. From their union was born a son with the body of a buffalo. In the meanwhile, Kapilasingha, who was searching for his wife, was led by a sage to Singhala. There, near Subarnagiri hills, he found his wife with the child. Dharmarekha seeks forgiveness for having lost her chastity but Kapilasingha, overcome with tenderness, takes her back and they settle down in a newly built city Jenabati, on the bank of Kamakshi. The son is named Mahisasura, the buffalo demon. Dharmarekha's faint resistance to her husband seems to have yielded a good result. In his love for his wife and child, Kapilasingha undergoes a transformation and they lead a happy family life.

Mahisasura grows up, trained in warfare and with an incorrigible desire for power and immortality. He undertakes 9,000 years of penance, forcing Brahma to grant him his wish to be 'the undisputed monarch of the three/Worlds' and that he 'won't be killed/In Narayana's hands. Vishnu's wheel/ Can't harm me; no man can put me to death.' Mahisasura was so utterly convinced of the powerlessness of the woman that he felt that he had finally achieved immortality. The asura then begins to acquire lordship over one dominion after another until all the kingdoms of Singhala come under his sway. He expanded his father's kingdom Jenabati and settled two lakh demons there. As a ferocious warlord, Mahisa first slays Tarakshi, the powerful king of Kurancheka, and then proceeds for a battle with Merusala, the fearsome king of Bajra, a kingdom at the foot of the Meru mountain. Mahisa tastes his first defeat at the hands of Merusala and is overcome with

doubt and anxiety about the efficacy of Brahma's boon. He, however, gets ready for his next battle with Dhumraketu, who ruled the rich kingdom of Karancha. Dhumraketu's minister, however, tells the king that the latter's clan has historical affinity with the clan of Mahisasura after which the king sends his son Dhumralochana to welcome Mahisasura to their kingdom. Mahisasura, happy with the king's allegiance, ordains Dhumralochana as his charioteer. He next proceeds to Kusha, which was ruled by Prachandasura. Mahisa demands the services of Chanda and Munda, the powerful sons of the king of Kusha. Prachandasura rejects the demand, following which a fierce war ensues. The exploits of Chanda and Munda force Mahisasura to use his powers of invisibility but Chanda and Munda prove invincible. Mahisasura offers to make peace with Prachandasura and requests the services of Chanda and Munda whenever required. The king of Kusha accedes to his request and they make peace. Feeling smug after his territorial acquisitions, Mahisasura is seen riding with his army until he comes to Chandra island. The king Chandra Naumi, in the meantime, was arranging a *swayambara* for his beautiful daughter Chandrabati. For the wedding, he had invited 1,10,000 kings for his daughter to choose from. The poet names thirty-two kings and goes on to say that the sources of his subject are the *Bhagavata*, the *Vishnu Purana*, the Vedas and the eighteen Puranas.

I write it in my own ignorant way.  
 One lakh ten thousand kings have assembled  
 In Chandra island with lakhs of warriors  
 And attendants. To give an exhaustive list  
 Of all of them would be tiresome. My knowledge  
 Is no doubt limited. The *pandits* will not  
 Appreciate it. For the common men it will be  
 Dense. Therefore, I've quoted only some  
 Important names.

In the *swayambara*, the kings pitifully fail the test. Just then, Mahisasura descends upon the kingdom of Chandra and seeks to participate in the *swayambara*. Chandra Naumi rebukes him, saying he would not give his daughter to a *chandal*. Mahisasura is enraged and forcefully takes the test and passes it. The king then gives away his daughter to Mahisasura who requests that his two brothers-in-law Raktabirjya and Bidulaksha be allowed to accompany him in his triumphal march back to his kingdom. On their way back, Mahisasura invades the kingdom of Jambu and a bloody battle ensues. King Padmalabha of Jambu is eventually killed by Raktabirjya. Drunk with power, Mahisasura marches on and annexes the whole of Jambu island. But there was still Kulabati, which was a formidable kingdom on the southern coast of the sea ruled by two brothers Shumbha and Nishumbha. The brothers had Brahma's boon to rule the heavens and the earth but they would be burnt to ashes if they touched each other's head. The fierce battle with Shumbha and Nishumbha is led by Mahisasura's first line of command comprising Raktabirjya, Biraghanta, Chamara and Bemala. The second line of command is led by Jayasingha, Bajrasingha and Mahisasura. But Mahisasura loses the battle and surrenders to Shumbha who embraces him and offers him the kingdom of Kulabati as a sign of friendship. In his march for power, Mahisasura thus acquires both territories and more and more asura friends.

However, the heavens are yet to be conquered. A letter from Mahisasura, 'the monarch of all kingdoms', is issued to be carried by his messengers Sahasra and Prashasta to Indra:

Sri Mahisasura commands Indra of Amaravati  
To present himself before him with Airavata,  
Rambha, Parijata and Uchchaihsrava.

But Indra acts deplorably, killing the messengers. Andhaka, whose eyes had been plucked out by Mahisasura when he had

advised the latter in his childhood to stop his wicked actions, had approached Shiva who had granted him the boon to see the past, present and future. He informs Shumbha and Nishumbha that the messengers had been killed by Indra. The two brothers set out for Amaravati, in a chariot pulled by a thousand lions. The timid Indra hardly puts up a fight and rushes to Brahma for help. Brahma says he has to take care of all beings and advises Indra to let Shumbha and Nishumbha rule Amaravati and asks him to stay with his *gandharvas* and *apsaras* in Brahma's abode. Meanwhile, the asura brothers continue to hold sway; they force Yama to flee in fear; and force Kubera to abandon his kingdom Alakapuri, and post their guards there. Having thus established their rule in the heavens, the brothers return with their booty to present to their lord Mahisasura in Jenabati.

It included

The jewels collected from the sea when, years ago,  
The sea was being churned. Mahisa adorned  
Himself with the robes and ornaments that Indra  
Used to wear, and the rest, he gave away among  
His commanders. Raktabirjya, Biraghanta  
And Bidulaksha put the necklaces of the gods  
Around their necks. All of Mahisa's followers  
Revelled in drinking, dancing and playing musical  
Instruments. At Mahisa's command, the charioteer  
Decorated the chariot with nine kinds of gems  
And yoked lions to it. As Mahisa adorned  
The chariot, it flew into the sky at the speed  
Of the wind. The gods, *gandharvas*, *dakshas*  
And *kinnaras*, whoever were there in heaven fled  
In fear. With his followers, Mahisasura entered  
Amaravati, where he was received warmly.  
Shumbha and Nishumbha offered him the coronation  
Attire of Indra. They offered gems to Ratkabirjya,

Andhaka, Biraghanta, Kantimala, Chanda, Munda,  
 Bidulaksha, Bhaskar, Surabara, Bhagava,  
 Birabahu, Lohasura, Kanka, Dhanka, Kalanala,  
 Bahu, Subahu, Chanda, Prachanda, Umura,  
 Dumura, Sukha, Durmukha, Gila, Mahagila,  
 Tadaka and Bimukha. Praising Shumbha  
 And Nishumbha, Mahisa said, 'It's for you that  
 The entire heaven became ours'. He ordained  
 Kalaketu as the king of Sanjibanipura,  
 Biraghanta became the king of Hemabantapura;  
 The charge of Hiranyagarvapura was left  
 To Bidulaksha and Chamara and Bemala  
 Became the custodians of Alakapuri.

When in danger, the gods turn to Narayana and so they did.

Looking at Narayana's face,  
 All the gods wailed and wept. They were saying,  
 'You're our only Saviour. We have become  
 Slaves in our own homes. We have been robbed  
 Of our power and position.' A howl of grief  
 Filled the night air.

With great power, Mahisa lived in great fear. One day, which was the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Ashwin, Mahisa 'disguised as a buffalo was skulking at the foot of the Meru mountain' when he heard Narayana telling the gods how to kill Mahisa. 'In a mad fit he struck the mountain with his horns' which made the mountain crumble. The gods who dwelt therein were infuriated and it seemed 'as if the seven worlds were in flames'. Mahisa springs into action and makes elaborate plans to disempower the gods and invade Brahma's abode where the gods had taken refuge. Shumbha and Nishumbha protest, saying that all that he has achieved is because of Brahma and that he should give up his plans but Mahisa reacts in pain and anger.



'If he is our father, how does he think  
 Ill of us? A father unable to protect his family  
 Deserves to die.'

Parikshit became impatient to know what the gods did when  
 the place was ablaze. Shuka starts his story of Sri Durga. Brahma  
 fervently prays to the god of fire, from which emerges his sister  
 'sparkling like a gem'.

Her forehead was made of the fire of  
 Brahma; her face of that of Narayana;  
 Her teeth of Mahesvar's; eyes of God of Fire,  
 Nose of Indra; radiance of her face of Aditya;  
 Tongue of the Moon, cheeks of Yama; chest of  
 Kubera;

Armpit of God, the Formless; navel of Sanaka;  
 The folds on her abdomen of Ashwini Kumar;  
 The nose-rings of Yama and Brihaspati; thighs  
 Of Prajapati; feet of Ananta Basuki; toes of  
 The nine planets and Bhrigu; fingers of Kunda  
 Buds; the back of Hemabanta; the hair of the stars;  
 The belly of Baruna; the water in her body of Rain;  
 Her one thousand hands of forty-nine winds;  
 Her words of Yama and her holiness of  
 Vaishnavas.

She was as wise as Brahma; as enchanting  
 As Kamadeva; as warlike as Krishna; as learned  
 As Brihaspati; as boastful as Indra; as glorious  
 As the Moon; as radiant as the Sun; as cruel as  
 Yama;  
 As forbearing as the Earth; as swift as the Wind;  
 As sacred as the Meru; as charming as the Rain;  
 As solemn as Baruna, as captivating as Parvati  
 And as resolute as Kumara.

Listen, O King! She was born from the fire,  
 Contributed by each of the gods; her nature was  
 An amalgam of their attributes. Suddenly

The voice of Providence was heard from above:  
 She is the one who will save the world from  
 The powers of evil, so she is named Durga.

Brahma, on behalf of the gods, begs her to kill Mahisasura. Durga, who does not speak much, assures him and stretches out her hand to receive the gods' weapons, seemingly implying that unlike the gods, who constantly face the threat of usurpation and physical combat with their asura counterparts, and hence carry their own weapons, the Goddess is stepping into unconventional, though not unfamiliar, territory. However, Durga does not complain. She is powered from within by her natural tenacious resolve to protect and from without an animus embodied in the gods' weapons. At the same time, she is protected by her selfless purpose which is not only to preserve order but also to create conditions for regeneration. But her sparse speech seems to be an eloquent expression of her foresight about an impending upheaval.

Maheswari started her journey, riding a lion.  
 Her thousand hands with thousand weapons were  
 Outspread, her head touching the sky.  
 [...]
 [...] The hem of her skirt hung over  
 Sixty-five *yojanas* of land when she moved along.  
 On a mountain to the north-east of a jungle  
 Called Uddana, on the banks of Saraswati,  
 She alighted and took her seat. At its foot was  
 Jenabati city, to its north was a banyan tree  
 Called Jata and to the far north was Kulabati city.  
 All those places were located near the Labana sea.  
 The gods in heaven were watching each of her  
 Movements carefully. Hiding her extra hands  
 Inside her body and her weapons in the *khechari*  
 Chariot, Katyayani stayed seated where she was.

Durga chooses to descend directly on a conflict zone in which the terms and conditions of the war have so far been laid down by Mahisa — aggression and cruelty, self-aggrandizement, and violence and disruption. It is difficult to ignore the poet's strategic use of the figures of the narrator and the narratee to imply the continuity in the tradition of war discourse. While the rules of Kurukshetra war did not permit a woman to participate in war in a deliberate act to suppress the warrior woman to manifest herself (the story of Amba and her desperate reappearance as Srikhandi in the *Mahabharata* is well known to be explained) as well as to project an idealized non-threatening image onto a woman, which we shall come to in the following paragraphs, *ChP* seems a deliberate counter to the fallacious cultural perception about the unnaturalness of women going to war. It is not to set new rules for women's participation in war or to encourage women to be war-like but to explain the conditions in which it may be natural for a woman to go to war and to alert the readers to the dangerous nature of such conditions.

Durga is noticed by Chanda and Munda who were having their midday bath in the river. It was unnatural for them to behold a beautiful young woman sitting all alone on a mountain. The brothers are met with a figure they are not used to and hence they ask:

[...] Where

Do you come from? Who is your husband?

Whose daughter are you? You're so young

And beautiful. What did you do that provoked

Your husband to forsake you? Are you

a demoness, a supernatural being, or a dweller

Of the forest?

Durga 'softly' rejects their projections of an ideal woman as

one who can be identified as belonging to a man, be it a father or a husband and changes the frame of reference to explain her identity. At the same time, she deliberately narrates the fate of a woman who behaves in a way which can lead to disintegration of family and social life:

[...] O demons

Here are the answers to your queries

My mother is Fire and my father Anakara.

As the daughter of Fire, I'm of Nirakara's clan.

My husband's name is God, the Almighty.

I'm ill-mannered and intolerant. I'm not loyal

To my husband as I'm not cut out for conjugal

Relationship. In the very first night, I refused

To sleep with him. In anger, he turned me

Out of the house. For my deviant behaviour

I failed to lead a family life and was forced

To come here for shelter.

She continues:

When I've given up

The hope of my life, should I fear the wicked  
demons?

A confused Chanda<sup>12</sup> asks if she would want to be Mahisa's queen consort. 'Tell him that I have come here only for him', Durga replies. The two rush to their king and describe every

<sup>12</sup> Kala Trobe explains Durga as 'overwhelming and difficult to define'. 'Being the personification of all the power of good in the cosmos, Durga is overwhelming and difficult to define, exacerbating her quality of distance, particularly from the male or demonic of the species. However, she may be approached on a more personal level as mother of the universe, *Mataji*, in her kindly and pleasant aspect or, for women, as an exemplar of inner strength and overriding intelligence.' (*Invoke the Goddess: Visualisations of Hindu, Greek and Egyptian Deities*, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2000, p. 21).

part of her body in great detail which stirs Mahisa's lust. They return to her with Mahisa's gifts for her and implore:

O mother! The glory of a woman lies in having  
A husband in her youth, and you are going to  
achieve It.

The king has agreed to make you his wife.

Durga demands that Mahisa come to her. Mahisa is enraged and orders Chanda and Munda to bring her forcibly. Making it clear that she is not purposely seeking conflict, and seemingly trying to ward off prospects of physical aggression, Durga reminds them of ethical behaviour, that of a king towards his objects, and of a man towards a woman. The demons understand none of that and try to catch her. Durga lets out a 'roar of rage' and issues forth Chhaya (shadow Goddess) and Maya (the Goddess of illusion) blended as Kalaratri (the Goddess of death) who gulps down Chanda and Munda along with the other demons who were accompanying them. Mahisa, meanwhile, is sick with desire for Durga. Fearing that Chanda and Munda might have been killed, he asks Shumbha and Nishumbha to fetch her. Durga engages them in conversation and entices them with an offer of love, following which the demons let her in on the secret of their death. Now Durga wants them to dance. Anxious to please her, they dance and are cleverly led by Durga to touch each other's head. Forgetting Brahma's note of caution, the demons fall down dead. Mahisa sends all his commanders one after another and Durga, while firmly rooted in her conscious self, brings forth wild attributes from the dark depths of her being, variously embodied in sixty-four fierce goddesses, the *yoginis*. These *yoginis* lived on the flesh and blood of men and animals, and are hungry. Durga unleashes them on the demons who are annihilated and devoured by the *yoginis*. Each of Mahisa's commanders is

seen begging for love and sex from the *yoginis* who use the opportunity to crush the demons to death. However, Raktabirjya, the demon of blood and semen, proves to be formidable. Durga had to issue forth one lakh *dakinis* to gulp every drop of blood that fell from Raktabirjya because numerous demons would be born from a single drop yet Raktabirjya seemed invincible. It is then that Durga shakes her sword from which appears Kalika who dwells in Narayani's (one of the *yoginis*) cutlass and 'devours the entrails of each demon killed by Narayani'. Raktabirjya is finally killed.

[...] It was a ghastly sight to see someone  
Swallowing a demon, his head sticking out of  
Her mouth. Someone had swallowed the legs  
Of the demon while his hands were hanging from  
Her mouth. Another was gnawing at the ribs  
Of a demon. Someone had wrung a demon's neck  
And tucked him under her arm.

Terrified with the loss of his bravest commanders, Mahisa cowers and is overcome with self-doubt. Even more soldiers volunteer to fight on his behalf and are killed mercilessly. The time arrives for Durga to face Mahisa, who has started for the battlefield.

Just when Durga and her troops are revelling in the glory of their victory, the earth rises baying for blood as there are even more demons left to be killed. Durga invites numerous goddesses and orders them to seduce the demons and kill them. The *yoginis* and the earth feast on the corpses and the dance of death continues until Mahisa himself arrives near Ratnagiri mountain where Durga is stationed since the war began, and he uproots it with his buffalo horns. The mountain is uprooted and Durga loses her throne until she finds another seat on the Subarnachuda mountain. Mahisa's reaction alerts

Durga who realizes that she has to enter into physical combat with Mahisa. Both Mahisa and Durga transform themselves into lions and a fierce battle ensues. But Durga fails to kill Mahisa, who escapes to return with renewed vigour. Another battle follows and Mahisa escapes to hide in the sea. Durga is deeply worried and from within her issues forth another Goddess in white with four hands, four faces and red complexion. She reminds Durga that Mahisa will not die until he sees her naked form, according to a boon granted him by Brahma. Durga resists, saying that she will do no such thing and she couldn't care less if the earth is in peril.

Let not the wicked demon die; let the gods  
Be driven away from heaven; let the nine  
Islands of the world be destroyed. But I can't  
Show my naked body to the three worlds.

While Mahisa is on the run, the Goddess persists, and Durga painfully understands the futility of her resistance.

'What a shame to expose  
My nakedness to everyone!'

The Goddess reminds Durga of her commitment to preserve order and bring peace and Durga is forced to take the form of Chamunda, stripping herself naked. Mahisa who is lying down completely drained, stares into a deathly chaos as Chamunda steps on him and the buffalo demon breathes his last.

In his march to power, Mahisa had been defeated by the gods and *asuras* several times. Even after being granted the boon that no man would be able to kill him, he was aware of the decoys that Narayana would employ to kill him. Andhaka his minister had warned him that Narayana is known to take feminine forms. Desperate to claim agency in his inevitable

death as the only way to hold power, Mahisa seems troubled by a sense of impotence in a world weighing against him and thus directs his frustration towards the feminine world. It becomes an absolute assault on feminine modesty when Brahma grants him his wish that he would die seeing a woman in her naked form. With Chamunda stepping on him, the asura, unlike Ravana or Kamsa, does not seem penitential but instead stares into the pathway to the womb, perhaps to be born again.

Durga's war with Mahisasura is an archetypal story about the terror of feminine power challenged by male brutality and malevolence. But the story also embodies a tragic threat to feminine modesty in a world seized by male lust and desire for domination. The earth's cry for blood and her desire to devour her own is a frightening expression of pain born of a realization that she is face to face with the most 'demonic of the species'<sup>13</sup> whom she has to destroy. Chamunda is an ideational manifestation become necessary because of the nature of challenge at hand. The moment of Durga's transformation is not a celebratory one of unbridled power but a distressing one because of the need for Durga's violent affirmation of redemptive love for her creation. Durga's naked form is unsightly and unbearable to the gods who flee the sight, while Shiva implores Durga, 'I pray to you to put your clothes on', to which Durga replies, 'Don't you know I have taken a vow not to cover my body?' Shiva becomes aware about her transformation as a cataclysmic event which would change mankind's perception about a wondrous femininity forever.

URMISHREE BEDAMATTA

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.





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## Prayer to Sri Ganesh

Glory to Dadhibamana!  
Glory to Bighnaraj, the Benevolent one!  
He, who sees you for once,  
Achieves his heart's desire.  
He, whom you bless, wins fame and fortune.  
Praise be to Girija's son, the Merciful,  
Who broke one of his teeth in a scuffle with  
Kartik, and who meditates in *khechari*  
Posture. Slayer of demons, you copied down  
The eighteen Puranas. *Yogi* of *yogis*,  
You have conquered time, space  
And repose. Your eyes look like the caves  
Of the Meru mountain. You are often lost  
In the joy of heavenly love. Your mission to  
Protect the righteous and wipe out the wicked  
Will continue as long as the moon  
And the sun exist. Dressed in white,  
You have the complexion  
Of the blue water lily. You have no beginning,

Nor end. You manifest yourself in all  
The elements that constitute the universe.  
Vyasa sang the Puranas to you,  
And you took them down. O Girija's son!  
When, as a child, you were at play,  
You held the sea in the palm of your hand,  
Which, a moment later, disappeared into the air.  
O my lotus-eyed Lord!  
You instruct me what to write.  
Girija's mercy enabled me to have your  
Blessings which redeemed my fears.

Thus says Sarala Das, praying at the feet  
Of Bighnaraj, the well-wisher of mankind.

---

## Prayer to Goddess Sarala

In Satya Yuga, the Creator,  
Known by the name of Krupajal, created  
The whole universe. It was to him  
That the great Goddess, a Vaishnavi  
And the Saviour of the world, was born.  
Narmada Saraswati was the name  
Given to her, who, by her knowledge  
In scriptures, pleased her father. Held guilty  
Of a minor offence, her father cursed her.  
She had to live in exile, by the name  
Of Hingula, in Chandrabhaga, a holy  
Place in Oda rastra in the Jambu island  
Called Bharata. Later, she shifted to Kanaka  
Parshuramapatana where she has been worshipped  
As Sarala Chandi for one lakh and thirty-two  
Thousand years of Kali Yuga. The Saviour  
Of mankind and a great *yogini*, she is the one  
Whom Sudramuni Sarala Das worships.

O Noble ones!

Pardon me for my mistakes. I have not done  
Anything worthwhile in my life. I am ignorant,  
Unlearned and unintelligent. I owe my debt  
Of gratitude to Goddess Katyayani  
Of Jankherpur who instructs me to write  
The scripture. O Noble ones!

Whatever she dictates me during her nightly  
Visitation, I write it down as soon as  
The sun rises. I do as she says.  
That I have become a Sudramuni  
Is because she wants me to be so.

---

## Mahisasura's Meditation

Cursed for his childish prank,  
Parikshit, the king of Kuru dynasty,  
Was bitten by Takshak on the left side  
Of his nose. The painful effect of poison  
Made every nerve in his body tense.  
In bitter agony, he prayed to Narayana  
To save him from the pangs of death.  
It was then that Shuka,  
A great sage, well versed in the Vedas  
And Puranas, met him.

The king bowed to him in respect,  
Offering him finery, earrings and gems.  
Most politely, he begged him, 'Glory to you,  
O sage! I implore you to fulfil my wishes.  
See, I've no son; my clan is on the verge  
Of extinction, and I'm at death's door,  
Being bitten by Takshak.' With consolatory  
Words, the sage said, 'Listen to the *Vishnu Purana*

Attentively; you'll be blessed with a son  
 And conveyed to Vishnu's abode after death.  
 Now perform the rites required for listening  
 To the scripture.' When it was done, Parikshit  
 Said, 'O sage! Narayana incarnated himself  
 Hundreds and thousands of times to wipe out  
 The demons. Of these, his incarnation as Durga,  
 Who slew Mahisasura in war, amazes me most.  
 Tell me the story of Chandi and put  
 My anxiety to rest.' Sage Shuka began:

'Simhika of Kashyap's clan gave birth  
 To a son named Rahu, whose son was  
 Jambu, grandson, Japasura and great-grandson,  
 Khajara. Khajara had a son, Angira by name.  
 Angira's son was called Amaya and grandson,  
 Lohasura. Lohasura's son was Andhaka  
 And Andhaka's son was Tadaka. Tadaka had  
 A son named Maya, whose son was Bajrabahu,  
 Grandson, Maruchi and great-grandson, Kalinchi.  
 In Satya Yuga, while Narayana was asleep  
 In Saraswati's lap, Tadaka went on destroying  
 The holy places and tormenting the sages. At that  
 Time Shiva burnt Kama to ashes, and his son,  
 Kumar slew Tadaka. Tadaka's son mounted  
 An attack on heaven, forcing Indra to flee.'  
 Surprised, Parikshit prayed to the sage to speak  
 More about it. Shuka continued:

'In an unexpected situation, Rahu was put  
 To death; the body of the demon with a thousand  
 Hands was cut in half. Listen, O Parikshit!

In Satya Yuga, the three worlds were submerged  
By the deluge. While having a yogic slumber  
In Saraswati's lap, Narayana blew his nose,  
From which two demons, Madhu and Kaitabha  
Were born. He stationed them in heaven where  
They grew up. They could walk on water without  
Getting their feet wet. Enamoured of Saraswati's  
Beauty, they made amorous advances to her.  
Annoyed, she roused Narayana from sleep  
And complained to him against them.

His eyes glinting angrily, Narayana stood up  
With the wheel in his hand. Scared, the demons  
Begged, "O Lord! We have committed  
A grievous crime in our ignorance. We must  
Pay for it. We pray to you to kill us at a place  
Where there will be no water." They knelt down  
Exposing their thighs. Narayana held them  
By their arms and crushed them with his mace  
Until they turned to a pulp. He hurled their  
Flesh at the water, which became known as  
The earth. As the earth was made from  
The demons' flesh, it contained all their  
Attributes in it. The first king to rule  
The earth was Mahidas, by name.'

To dispel the doubts that had clouded his mind,  
Parikshit begged the sage for more details,  
To which the sage replied:

'Listen, O King! Saudas, Mahidas's son,  
Had a disciple named Jalataranga. His son,



Medha and grandson, Krutakeshi were hostile  
 To the gods and the sages. Krutakeshi's son,  
 Trijatasura drove away the gods from heaven.  
 His son was Bhaskar, grandson, Bajrasingha  
 And great-grandson, Kapilasingha. Mahisasura  
 Was born to Kapilasingha.

After twenty-four years of Kapilasingha's  
 Unflinching devotion to Lord Shiva, the Lord  
 Was pleased to offer him a boon. Kapilasingha  
 Begged him for empowering him with  
 Enormous sexual vigour to seduce women  
 And overpower them in the act of sex.  
 Receiving the boon, he went on ravishing  
 Women, one after another.  
 Frightened by his aggressive sexual behaviour,  
 His wife, Dharmarekha, left him and sheltered  
 In Singhala island in the guise of a buffalo.  
 After combing many islands and not finding  
 Her, Kapilasingha returned home with  
 A heavy heart.

Krutantaka, the buffalo, who was Yama's  
 Carrier, used to stay in Singhala. It was a  
 Sunday, the new moon day of the month  
 Of Bhadrab on which Krutantaka caught  
 Sight of the cow buffalo. Tempted to have her  
 At any cost, he followed her excitedly. Seeing him,  
 She began to run, Krutantaka chasing her  
 All the way, at a speed more than that of the wind.  
 After running for a distance of nine lakh  
 Yojanas, she stopped under a *sinsapa* tree

In the Subarnagiri hills on the bank of river  
Kamakshi that flowed through a jungle. It was  
There that Krutantaka pounced on her and had  
Sex with her most aggressively.  
It resulted in the birth of a son,  
With the body of a buffalo that looked  
As bright as gold and as radiant as fire.

While looking for his wife in a jungle,  
Kapilasingha met Sage Kapila and made friends  
With him. Learning from him about his missing  
Wife, the sage said to him,  
“No woman can take the place of a wife.  
The absence of a wife bears heavily on a man.  
Once, while I was in Singhala, I saw a pair  
Of buffaloes engaged in sex. The cow buffalo  
Was pleading, ‘I am not an animal like you.  
I’m Kapilasingha’s wife, Dharmarekha.  
You’re God’s carrier; I’m a demoness. It is  
Not proper on your part to touch me.’ Paying  
No heed to her appeal, he had sex with her.”  
So saying, the sage disappeared. Kapilasingha,  
Brimming with hope, left for Singhala island.

Reaching the Subarnagiri hills, he met  
His wife who was sitting there with a child.  
Delighted by the sight of the child,  
Kapilasingha forgot all about his craze for sex  
And women. Embarrassed, Dharmarekha  
Returned to her human form and told him,  
“Failing to bear with your sex urge, I forsook  
You and came here. Krutantaka, Yama’s carrier,

Raped me. I've demeaned myself, losing my  
 Chastity. Don't think of me any longer. I'm  
 A disgrace to the demon community. Better  
 Leave me to my fate." Kapilasingha told her  
 Soothingly, "I won't leave you alone. We'll live  
 Together here with our son." He built a city  
 On the bank of Kamakshi and named it Jenabati.  
 He named his son Mahisasura.

Mahisasura grew up and learnt the skills  
 Of war. Then, he went into meditation for  
 Nine thousand years, living only on water.  
 Thinking on Brahma, he raised  
 A sacrificial fire, and cutting pieces of flesh  
 From his body, consigned to it. In spite of  
 So much austerity, Brahma was not to be seen.  
 He continued his meditation for another twenty-one  
 Thousand years. At last he entered the pit of fire,  
 Caring least for his life. Surprisingly,  
 His body did not burn. It took a total of eighty  
 Thousand years to attract Brahma's attention.  
 Mahisa's steadfast devotion panicked the gods.  
 Rudra, the Moon, Yama, the Wind, Brihaspati,  
 Indra, the Sun, Baruna and Kubera proceeded  
 To Yashobantipur to inform Brahma about it.  
 Their palms against their cheeks, they briefed  
 Brahma the reason for their concern.

Brihaspati said, "O Creator of the universe,  
 Cause of causes, Ocean of Kindness!  
 You're Maker of the new world.  
 You created fifty-six crores of living beings;

You've no beginning. You've attained *siddhi*;  
 Your mind is pure, you've protected your  
 Creation from the fury of the deluge. When  
 You're awake, creation goes on; when you're  
 Asleep, the deluge takes place. We've no words  
 To describe your glory."

Thus says Sarala Das, praying at the feet  
 Of Brahma, the greatest of all gods  
 And the Redeemer of all souls.

x x x

Sage Shuka continued:

'Listen, O Parikshit!

Finding the gods in dismay, Brahma asked,  
 "O Gods! Why are you fretting?"

Brihaspati replied, "Demon Mahisasura  
 Of Rahu's clan has been in meditation

In Singhala island, praying to you to become  
 Immortal." Indra feared, "He will occupy

Heaven." Kubera said, "He'll oust me from

My position." Yama added, "He'll dethrone me."

Brihaspati complained, "His success will cause  
 Consternation among the gods."

Realizing that it was a difficult situation,  
 Brahma replied, "I'll visit him now. I'll bless  
 Him with a boon, commensurate with his devotion.  
 In the meantime, all of you take necessary steps  
 To protect your wealth and position. Let me  
 Know from him what he likes to have before  
 I do anything. Now go to your abode without

Any apprehension. Know that your safety  
 Is my responsibility.” So saying, he sat  
 On the swan, his carrier, and started his journey,  
 Followed by *brahmarsis*, such as Basistha,  
 Vishwamitra, Bamadeva, Agasti, Paulasti,  
 Satamanu, Valmiki, Narada, Bibhandaka,  
 Markanda, Sudeva, Varadwadasha, Sumanta,  
 Rishyashringa, Kaushika and Bhrigu,  
 Three crores of *dakshas* and disciples.  
 They went past the seven worlds and reached  
 Singhala island. They found Mahisa’s hermitage  
 Under the *sinsapa* tree on the Subarnagiri  
 Hills on the banks of Kamakshi. All were surprised  
 By Mahisa’s devotion, the like of which they  
 Had never seen nor heard before. The sages  
 Settled themselves on the summit of the hills.  
 Alighting from the swan, Brahma proceeded  
 To the sacrificial fire, but found no one there.  
 When he put out the fire by sprinkling some water  
 From his *kamandalu*, he caught sight of a red,  
 Radiant object inside the pit. It was Mahisa.  
 He had no nails, nose, nor legs; he looked like  
 A pillar made of gem. Taking some nectar  
 In his right hand, he sprinkled it over  
 His body. And lo! With the touch of nectar,  
 His limbs began to grow and his former self  
 Restored. He was of red complexion with  
 The head of a buffalo that touched the sky.  
 When Brahma offered him a boon, he flew  
 Into a rage and bawled at him, “What an ordeal  
 I had to pass through all these years! Who are you?  
 Where have you come from? Why did you disturb

My meditation? What a boastful brahmin  
 You are! I must take your life today." Brahma  
 Replied calmly, "I'm Brahma". Mahisa cried out,  
 "I don't believe it unless you show me  
 The proof. You could have spoken to me through  
 A voice from above! I won't trust you unless  
 You show me the signs of Brahman." Brahma  
 Showed him his real form with four heads:  
 The left one was the face of a guru, the right one  
 Of the Creator, the one on the front was of Brahma  
 And the rear one of Biranchi. He had eight  
 Hands, carrying bow, arrow, mace, staff,  
*Kamandalu*, rosary and the Vedas. He had  
 Twelve holy signs on his body. He was reading  
 Out the Vedas rhythmically that vibrated through  
 The air. He was wearing a cloth, the front end  
 Of which was tucked to his waist at the back.  
 He had long hair and sandalwood marks  
 On his forehead. He was in a yogic posture.  
 O Parikshit! How can I describe him who is  
 The Creator of the universe? The demon saw  
 His huge form that had pervaded the three worlds.  
 He was blessing him by stretching one of his  
 Hands and saying, "Now tell me what you  
 Wish to have".

Making an appeal to the Almighty, Yama,  
 The Wind, the Fire, the Water and the Sky  
 To be witnesses, Mahisa said, "If you're so  
 Kind, bless me that I'll outlive the four Ages,  
 Until the time of the next deluge. Yama can't  
 Claim me; no disease can weaken me.

My body will be as strong as thunder;  
 No arrow nor weapons can pierce into it,  
 Even it can withstand the weight  
 Of a mountain. Fire can't burn me;  
 Water can't drown me, the curse of sages  
 Can't harm me. I'll attain *siddhi* in *yoga*  
 And none in the three worlds can conquer me.  
 Indra, Rudra, Baruna, Yama and the Sun will sing  
 My glory. With the help of *uluka vidya*,  
 I'll be able to disappear or take any form as  
 And when I wish. The gods will flee their  
 Abode in fear; the Wind and the Fire won't dare  
 Ravage my kingdom. Space and Time can't  
 Bind me. I'll master all the sixty-four skills  
 Of *yoga*. I'll have the power to see the unseen.  
 I'll be the undisputed monarch of the three  
 Worlds. The sages and brahmins will serve  
 At my feet. No one in the three worlds, including  
 Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar can challenge  
 Me in war. As long as the moon and the sun  
 Exist, nothing can stop me from doing what  
 I want. The fear of Krishna induced me  
 To invoke you. Bless me that I won't be killed  
 In Narayana's hands. Vishnu's wheel  
 Can't harm me; no man can put me to death."

"So be it!" Brahma blessed him,  
 "You'll enjoy all your powers as long as I exist."

The sun had set by the time Brahma  
 Left for his abode. Empowered by Brahma's  
 Boon, Mahisa embellished Jenabati,

The city ruled by him, which exceeded  
The beauty of Baraswatipur. All the demon kings,  
Hearing about Mahisa receiving a rare boon,  
Submitted themselves to him.'



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## Mahisasura's Conquest of Kurancheka

'Soon the demon kings, one after another,  
Pledged their allegiance to Mahisasura.  
They included Kantimala, the son of Maya,  
Chamara and Bemala, sons of Bajranga  
Of the kingdom of Bilanka, Hiranaksha  
Of Madhurya kingdom, Dhumralochana  
Of Mukhayeka and King Chandra of Ajan.  
All the kingdoms of Singhala island came under  
His sway. Extending the territory of Jenabati  
To four lakh *yojanas*, he settled two lakh  
Demons there.

On the road to monarchy, he moved  
His troops to Kurancheka, a kingdom ruled by  
A powerful king, Tarakshi, to invade it.  
Occupying nine *yojanas* of land on the north  
Bank of river Swadhabi, they camped there.  
When the whole kingdom resonated with

The din and noise of the soldiers, the messengers  
Informed Tarakshi, "Mahisasura has arrived  
In our land to attack us. He is invincible. He has  
Brahma's boon. The kings of Singhala  
Island, after being forced to concede defeat,  
Are now serving at his feet." Enraged, Tarakshi  
Commanded his army to get ready for the battle.

Riding tigers, the king and his five crore  
Warriors marched on until they met the enemy.  
Tarakshi was startled to see Mahisa's huge army,  
As large as the sea. Soon after the battle started,  
Tarakshi's troops were overpowered. Kantimala  
Went on slaughtering them like a wild elephant  
In a garden of banana trees. It perplexed  
Tarakshi to see the number of his soldiers reduced  
To one lakh only, and all their tigers captured.  
With the surviving soldiers, Tarakshi knifed into  
Mahisa's army and battled hard to protect  
His kingdom. Kantimala, raising a war cry,  
Hit the enemy lethally; four of his soldiers  
Could kill Tarakshi's one lakh soldiers. Impatient  
And furious, Tarakshi launched a counter-attack  
Targeting Kantimala, knocking him flat on  
The ground, unconscious. Seeing their commander  
Lying senseless, the soldiers decided to make  
A hasty retreat. But, the situation took a turn  
When Chamara and Bemala reached  
There in a chariot. They showered arrows on  
Tarakshi, which broke into pieces,  
Unable to pierce into the king's body. When all their  
Attempts to subdue Tarakshi failed, they fetched

The *brahmasara* from Mahisa's hand and shot  
At him. It hit him on the head, and, like a tree,  
He fell down on the ground, dead. Chamara  
And Bemala chopped his head with a battle-axe  
And hurled it into the sea.

Mahisa's soldiers plundered all the wealth  
And riches of Kurancheka and carried them  
Away to Singhala. Mahisa's kingdom was now  
Extended to eleven *yojanas*. Death feared  
To enter the kingdom. The Sun and the Wind  
Dared not show their rage there. As days  
Passed, Mahisasura's fame and fortune  
Rose phenomenally.'

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## Mahisasura's Battle with Merusula

'On a Sunday, the eighth day of the bright  
Fortnight of the month of Ashwin, Mahisasura  
Invaded the kingdom of Bajra, situated at  
The foot of the Meru mountain and ruled by  
King Merusula. A battle broke out between  
Mahisasura and Merusula that continued  
For one hundred days. Both the armies  
Suffered heavy casualties; the battlefield  
Was soaked with blood, and the earth  
Rocked violently. Causing panic among  
The enemy, Kantimala, Chamara and Bemala  
Fought so valiantly that the eyebrows of the gods  
Were raised. Putting up a brave fight,  
Merusula killed many of Mahisa's soldiers  
With his mace. Unable to face Merusula,  
The soldiers began to retreat when Kantimala

Intervened. With words of inspiration  
He ordered his soldiers to fight bravely.

Listen, O Parikshit!  
For his unflinching devotion to Hemavanta,  
Merusula was blessed with immortality.  
While in war, Rudhipa and Lochana,  
The commanders of a king of Singhala  
Attacked Merusula with all their might.  
Flying into a fury, Merusula hit Lochana's  
Head with his mace that made him fall  
To the ground, unconscious. With a second  
Blow he left him completely immobile.  
Next, he charged at Rudhipa with a spade  
And vanquished him. Seeing Kantimala  
Left alone, Chamara and Bemala rushed  
To him to provide help, but they were  
Soon overpowered by Merusula's soldiers  
Who surrounded them and countered  
Each of their attacks.

Considering that he was in a difficult situation,  
Mahisa joined the battle himself. It became  
Sunset; the battle ended inconclusively.  
Realizing that Merusula was as invincible  
As he was, Mahisa left for Singhala in dismay.  
A doubt cropped up in his mind: Was Brahma's  
Boon true or false?

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## Dhumralochana Ordained as a Charioteer

‘O King Parikshit!

On a Thursday, the fourth day of the dark  
Fortnight of Chaitra, Mahisasura resumed  
His journey to conquer more kingdoms.

On the way, he came across a kingdom called  
Karancha that impressed him most. Each  
House there had a golden urn and flags  
Atop it. With a large army at his command,  
He camped there, deciding to invade it.

Udesh, the minister, informed King Dhumraketu  
About Mahisa’s arrival in their land. When  
The king wanted to know what brought him  
There, the minister said, “He and you belong  
To the same clan. There was a king called  
Kalpasura, who, cursed by Basistha,  
Turned to a demon. He had a son named  
Manudaksha. His sons were Raksha and Vaksha.  
Raksha had two sons, Heti and Praheti.

Who had three sons: Mali, Sumali and  
Malyabanta. Malyabanta's son was named  
Madana Mahadeva and grandson, Matanga  
Sadashiba. Malyabanta, who used to stay  
In Lanka, came back to Karancha island  
For fear of Vishnu. Matanga's son was  
Bilochana and grandson, Hiranya. Hiranya  
Had a son called Bailochana and grandson,  
Bali. Bali's son was Madalochana  
And his son, Kalabimochana. You're  
His son and your son is Dhumralochana."  
Glad to hear it, the king sent for his son,  
Asking him to welcome Mahisasura  
With plenty of gifts. On the seashore  
Of Karancha island, Dhumralochana met  
Mahisa with the presents. Introducing  
Dhumralochana to him, Kantimala  
Said, "He offers these presents as  
A gesture of goodwill. The king of the island  
Owes his allegiance to you." Most humbly,  
Dhumralochana invited Mahisa to the palace  
Where he was given a hearty welcome,  
Followed by celebrations all over the kingdom.  
Greatly entertained with their hospitality,  
Mahisa spent five days there. He ordained  
Dhumralochana as his charioteer and returned  
To Singhala jubilantly.'

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## Mahisasura Concedes Defeat to Chanda and Munda

'In a bid to expand his territory beyond  
Singhala island, Mahisasura set out with  
A large army in quest of new dominions. It was  
A Monday of the bright fortnight of Kartik.  
The sound of gongs and trumpets  
Filled the air. As the soldiers marched on,  
A cloud of dust rose, hiding the sun from  
View. There were eighty *kharbas* of warriors  
And seven *padmas* of attendants, each warrior  
Riding a tiger and equipped with weapons,  
Such as lance, sword, bow, arrow, mace  
And spear. Heaven resonated with their war  
Cry, which was as deafening as the roar  
Of the sea. On the full moon day of Kartik  
They left Singhala, and passing through Karancha,  
Reached Kusha island.



Known for his piety, Prachandasura,  
 The king of Kusha island, lived the life of a yogi,  
 His body smeared with ash, long matted hair  
 Hanging from his head. He was in ochre clothes,  
 The sacred thread running from the shoulder  
 To the waist, a *dambaru* in one hand and a trident  
 In the other. Death dared not visit his land ever.  
 He commanded an army of fourteen crore soldiers,  
 All of whom led the lives of yogis. His kingdom,  
 Measuring forty lakh *yojanas*, was inhabited  
 By people of eighteen castes, each one steadfastly  
 Loyal to the king. With Lord Shiva's blessing on him  
 He ruled his kingdom without the fear of rivalry.

When the sound of gongs and trumpets  
 Was heard from a distance, the messengers  
 Came running to him to inform, "O Lord!  
 Mahisasura has sneaked into your kingdom.  
 Because of Brahma's boon, he has been mightier  
 Than before. You're Narayana yourself;  
 The three worlds know you have been living since  
 Satya Yuga. You're competent enough to decide  
 Whether you want peace or war. You have been  
 In Lord Shiva's good graces from time immemorial.  
 He has received Brahma's boon only recently."

Hearing that Mahisasura was camping under  
 The banyan tree on Karunakar mountain, on  
 The banks of river Narmada, Shivapada,  
 The minister, told the king, "May I meet Mahisasura  
 And ask him the purpose of his visit? We'll try  
 To be friendly with him; if he doesn't reciprocate,

Battle is the only option.” When the king consented,  
He met Mahisasura with precious gifts.  
He found him with Chamara and Bemala  
And surrounded by warriors decked in gems  
And looking like heavenly beings. Pleased to see  
The gifts, Chamara and Bemala presented him  
Before the king and said, “The minister of King

x x x

Prachandasura has come to greet you. A devotee  
Of Vishnu, he has been a minister since Satya Yuga.”  
Offering the gifts, which seemed to please Mahisasura,  
The minister said humbly, “O Lord! My king  
Has conveyed his love to you. He is Shiva’s son  
And you’re Brahma’s son. This forges a bond  
Between you two.” Mahisasura replied, “Listen,  
O minister! Let your king know that Kantimala,  
The king of Singhala has surrendered to me with  
His wealth and riches. The king of Karancha island  
Submitted to my authority with his army. Your  
king, Prachandasura, has two sons, Chanda  
And Munda. If he is genuinely interested in  
Making friends with me, let him surrender  
His sons to me. It’ll strengthen our friendship  
For years to come. If he disagrees, he’ll have  
To face my wrath. I’ll kill him and eat his flesh.  
I’ll reduce his kingdom to rubble.” He bit his lips  
In anger and stood up like a column of fire  
That touched the sky.

Returning, Shivapada informed the king,  
“O King! Empowered by Brahma’s boon,

Mahisasura is on his way to conquer all  
 The islands. His oppression has been too much for  
 The earth to bear. He was born not to a man,  
 But to a buffalo. He agrees to your proposal  
 Of peace on the condition that you surrender  
 Your sons to him. He'll make them his commanders  
 And conquer the world utilizing their services."  
 Breaking down in grief, Prachandasura muttered,  
 "How can I part with my sons? I may give away  
 My army and my wealth. I may carry out his  
 Instructions, but how can I live without my sons?"  
 Saying so, he burst into tears. Collecting himself,  
 He commanded his minister to get the troops  
 Ready for the battle.

Blowing trumpets and bugles, Prachandasura's  
 Soldiers, their bodies smeared with ashes,  
 Marched on, with *dambaru* in one hand and trident  
 In the other. The sound of fourteen crores of *dambarus*  
 Blown at a time deafened the three worlds. Riding bulls,  
 The warriors marched ahead, raising a war cry  
 To repel the invading forces, which had spread  
 Like a sea. Both the armies met each other  
 On the banks of the river. Chanda and Munda,  
 Seated on tigers, assured their father,  
 "Don't worry as long as we are here". The king  
 Replied, "Listen! Mahisasura is hell-bent on  
 Capturing both of you. So, take care and position  
 Yourselves in the rear." Seeing Prachandasura's  
 Troops, Kantimala told Mahisasura, "Prachandasura  
 Has come with his army to battle against us.  
 It is because you asked for his sons." Mahisa

Commanded Bemala and Kantimala, “Move Quickly and prevent Prachandasura from Advancing further. In the meantime, using The *mantra* given to me by Brahma, I’ll disappear Into the sky, from where I’ll locate Chanda And Munda and capture them. If I fail, I’ll consider Brahma’s boon is of no use.”

Mahisa flew into the sky, making himself invisible. Seeing Chanda and Munda playing in the waters Of Ganga, he alighted there like a bird. By that time, His soldiers had already gathered there. Seeing The enemy in front of them, Chanda and Munda Rose from the waters, waving maces, and charged At them. Finding the battle gaining momentum, Mahisa shouted at Chanda and Munda, “Wait! Wait! How could you master the skills Of war at so tender an age?” Turning to his soldiers, He instructed, “I’m amazed by their outstanding Performance. Don’t kill them. We’ll catch them Alive and take them away with us.” At this, The soldiers surrounded Chanda and Munda Enraged, the heroes of Kusha island went on The offensive, which caused havoc among The enemy. In a short time, Mahisa’s two thousand Soldiers were eliminated; the rest stood as dumb As a tribe of goats. The two brothers made A formidable combination; the sight of blood Doubly excited them. Boiling mad, Mahisasura Commanded the panicked soldiers to fight back. They rained down arrows on them, but by The grace of Lord Shiva, their bodies had turned

To thunder, strong enough to withstand the attack.  
Furious, Chanda and Munda retaliated  
Destroying one lakh soldiers, reducing  
The strength of Mahisa's army to three hundred.  
Awestruck, Mahisa watched Chanda and Munda  
Chasing those who were on the run.  
Mahisa disappeared into the sky where he met  
Kantimala, Chamara and Bemala. He told  
Them, "It's better to draw a treaty of peace  
Than to fight a losing battle. Let's meet  
King Prachandasura and make friends with  
Him. If he declines to accept our offer, we'll  
Resume the battle with renewed energy."  
Unarmed and barefooted,  
They went to meet the king.

Shivapada informed the king, "Leaving the battle  
Midway, Mahisasura has come here to make peace  
With us. If we don't oblige him, we'll incur God's  
Displeasure." As Mahisasura arrived, Shivapada  
Bowed at his feet and told him, "Both the kings  
Are now friends to each other. The history of your  
Family reveals that both of you have the same  
Lineage, you being the king's grandson."  
Pleased with their hospitality, Mahisa spent four  
To five days there. When it was time for him  
To leave, he requested the king to help him in times  
Of need and that he would like to have his sons  
With him. Prachandasura offered him five  
Of his commanders, thousands of soldiers  
And his sons. Reaching Singhala, Mahisa held  
A ceremony in honour of Chanda and Munda.

He ordained them the rulers of Jenabati,  
A city with a population of four lakh demons.'

Glory to you, O God, the Merciful,  
The lotus-eyed one! Let my devotion to you  
Be single-minded. O Friend of the poor  
And Protector of the righteous!  
I'm Sarala Das, son of Sarala Chandi,  
Kripajal's daughter. Too feeble and too  
Ignorant as I am, I write as the Goddess  
Instructs me. Her eyes are like the lotuses  
And face like the moon. O my Saviour!  
I pray at your feet.

---

## Mahisasura's Marriage with Chandrabati

With greatest respect, King Parikshit  
Asked Shuka, 'What did Mahisasura do after  
He occupied the three islands: Singhala, Karancha  
And Kusha? Tell me about his heroic exploits;  
That'll wash away the sins of my previous births.'  
Sage Shuka, proficient in scriptures, began:

'In an auspicious moment  
On a Thursday, the eleventh day  
Of the bright fortnight of the month of Magha,  
Mahisa led along  
His troops southwards, among the sounds  
Of trumpets and bugles. The soldiers followed  
Him from behind; Chamara and Bemala led  
From the front; Kantimala was at his right,  
Flanked by Chanda and Munda. As they  
Goose-stepped, the earth rocked under their  
Weight, while the gods in heaven watched them

In silence; some of them fleeing in panic.  
 Leaving Singhala, they reached Karancha, crossing  
 The Labana sea of twenty-six *yojanas*. Karancha  
 Measured forty *yojanas*. From there, they went  
 To Kusha island, crossing the Nila Sea of  
 Thirty lakh *yojanas*. Seeing Chanda and Munda  
 Enjoying Mahisa's favour, Prachandasura  
 And Shibapada were extremely happy. Then,  
 They ventured into the Chandra sea, eating  
 Whatever came their way, before reaching  
 Chandra island. They started ransacking it  
 As soon as they got there.

Chandra Naumi, the king of the island that  
 Measured thirty *yojanas*, belonged to the clan  
 Of Bhusanda Kaka. He lived with his wife,  
 Chandrarekha and daughter, Chandrabati,  
 Who was a paragon of beauty. Unable to find  
 A suitable groom for her, the king held  
 A *swayambara*, to which five lakh kings  
 From far and wide were invited. There was  
 A mountain there, Chandragiri by name,  
 In which the king had stored seven casks  
 Of nectar. It was guarded by five crore *gandharvas*.  
 It was from that mountain that the Moon,  
 The ruler of the Chandra sea, used to rise,  
 Lighting the whole island. The sea surrounding  
 Padma island was ruled by Bedabrahma. The sea  
 Encircling Ananta island in the north-east was  
 Under the authority of Aditya, from where the sun  
 Used to rise. Dhurjati was the king of the sea  
 Surrounding Kusha island. Kubera was the king



Of the sea around Kurancheka island.  
 The sea surrounding Kusha island was  
 Under the sway of Yama. Mahisasura  
 Stopped at the foot of the Chandragiri mountain,  
 Ransacking the adjacent areas.'

Parikshit begged the sage to tell him about  
 Chandrabati's *swayambara*. Sage Shuka said:

'King Chandra Naumi ordained one lakh  
 Ten thousand kings as prospective grooms for  
 His daughter. They were: Aranyaka of Kamoda,  
 Kalabali of Chandapur, Kanti of Matangapur,  
 Chandraksha of Akshana, Animisa of Ananga,  
 Niranjana of Niranjana, Nirmalasena of Kalinga,  
 Ichhapadma of Palasha, Juganta of Ajamatra,  
 Aindra of Sarada, Jalataranga of Jalandhar,  
 Prabalasingha of Naudha, Krutasena of Sudarsana,  
 Ridhipati of Matanga, Harisena of Parardha,  
 Aswamali of Burdwan, Bhagasena of Atuta,  
 Satasingha of Srikhanda, Runakeshi of Matanga,  
 Basantadeva of Kashyapa, Padmasena of Adita,  
 Sikharasena of Murdula, Karnamali of Satpadma,  
 Sarajati of Madhurya, Biranchi of Madhubana,  
 Madhuindu of Talam, Kikaliswar of Kikali,  
 Mala of Marbati, Sarasi of Chakrabratika,  
 Hiranyakachapa of Biraja, Kalingasena of Samidha,  
 Krutantika of Dehuka and many others. As told  
 By their father, Raktabirjya and Bidulaksha  
 Offered the guests golden thrones to sit  
 And entertained them with best hospitality.'

O mother Katyayani! O moon-faced One!  
 I owe my debt of gratitude to you for  
 Stimulating me to write. The sources of my  
 Subject are the *Bhagavata Vishnu Purana*,  
 The *Vedas* and the eighteen *Puranas*.  
 I write it in my own ignorant way.  
 One lakh ten thousand kings have assembled  
 In Chandra island with lakhs of warriors  
 And attendants. To give an exhaustive list  
 Of all of them would be tiresome. My knowledge  
 Is no doubt limited. The *pandits* will not  
 Appreciate it. For the common men it will be  
 Dense. Therefore, I've quoted only some  
 Important names. Sitting in Jambu island,  
 I'm talking about Kusha island, as told by Vyasa.

x x x

Sage Shuka told Parikshit:  
 'The kings attending the *swayambara* were  
 Entertained by the king and his sons, Raktabirjya  
 And Bidulaksha. The river Chandrabhaga,  
 Originating from Vishnu's feet, flowed there.  
 Cursed by Prajapati, the moon began to wane  
 After the full moon day; its size reduced each day,  
 Until it became a crescent. Feeling guilty and full  
 Of remorse, it plunged into the river. But,  
 Instead of dying out, it began to wax day by day  
 Till it reached its full form. Since then,  
 Chandrabhaga had been held as a sacred river.

The *swayambara*, held on the banks  
 Of the river, started with King Chandra

Addressing the invitees: "O kings!  
 Lend me your ears. I've taken a vow  
 Since the day I happened to witness  
 The *swayambara* of King Nairuta's daughter,  
 Shakuntala, in Jambu island. It was a Sunday,  
 The third day of the bright fortnight  
 Of the month of Magha. While travelling  
 In the air in my chariot when I heard a loud  
 Noise. Looking below, I saw a boisterous crowd  
 Assembled at a place in Jambu island. Alighting  
 From the chariot, I learnt that a *swayambara*  
 For the king's daughter was going on. The guests  
 Were surprised to see me, but my presence delighted  
 Shakuntala the most, who came forward and put  
 A gem necklace around my neck. I brought her  
 With me and married her here. She gave birth to  
 A daughter, named Chandrabati. Unable to find  
 A suitable groom for her, I've arranged  
 A *swayambara* and invited all of you. My  
 Daughter, Chandrabati, is a paragon of beauty;  
 None in the three worlds can match her. The moon  
 Has built a monument, studded with eight kinds  
 Of gems, to the north-east of the island. Its base  
 Measures twenty-five *yojanas* and height one lakh  
*Yojanas*, with Baruna sitting on the top of it.  
 The gems on it lighted the whole island.  
 All you've to do is to shoot an arrow  
 Which must get in through it.  
 One who wins the competition  
 Will marry my daughter.  
 This *swayambara* will continue for seven days,  
 Allowing everybody a chance to win."

Hearing this, all the kings flocked to the monument,  
Riding their respective carriers. Soon the place  
Became crowded and noisy. The monument  
Scared everyone. King Sudirgha said,  
“There can be no one on the earth to do it,  
Except Jamadagni’s son, Parshurama.” The kings  
Looked at each other in despair; the task seemed  
Too difficult for them to accomplish. They asked  
Chandra Naumi to show his daughter to them;  
That might inspire them to meet the challenge.  
The king asked Raktabirjya to fetch her there.

Chandrabati, decked in finery, arrived  
Ceremonially, among the sounds of music  
And ululation. Seeing her, the kings exclaimed,  
“What a beauty! None in the three worlds  
Except Parvati, can equal her. The shine of her face  
Will make the moon look paler, and the glow  
Of her body will make the gems fade into  
Insignificance. We are no match for her;  
If she is the moon, we are the stars.  
We’ll never forget this embarrassing  
Experience in our lives.” King Chandramauli  
Of Chanchal kingdom interrupted, “O kings!  
One who passes the test will marry the princess,  
No matter, whether he is handsome or ugly.  
What have you got to do with her beauty? Come,  
Let’s see, who can do it.” At this, the kings got up,  
Ready to try their luck. Karnakeshi, the king  
Of Antupara, was the first to shoot at  
The monument; the arrow he sent could not pass  
Beyond two *talas*. Next came Karnamali,

The king of Kinduka, whose arrow stopped after  
 Penetrating just one *tala*. All the kings  
 Tried their best to accomplish the task,  
 But their performance was below the mark.

At the time Mahisasura, who was travelling  
 In the mid-air, caught sight of the bride  
 From above. Enamoured of her beauty,  
 He descended there with a noise that resembled  
 The beating of the drum. His appearance was  
 Terrifying; he was huge, his hair and hands  
 Upraised, his teeth sticking out. He looked  
 Like Rahu swallowing the moon. Seeing  
 The demon, the kings began to flee. Mahisa  
 Reached the *swayambara* site while  
 Raktabirjya was shouting at the panicked  
 Kings to come back.

Mahisa told Chandra Naumi, "All the kings  
 Failed to prove their mettle. But I won't disappoint  
 You. I'll win the test and take Chandrabati  
 With me." Chandra Naumi replied, "We belong  
 To the clan of the Moon;  
 And you to the clan of demons.  
 Brahma, scared of you, gave you the boon.  
 How can I offer my daughter to a *chandal*?"  
 With a fiery temper, Mahisa picked up  
 His iron-bow, saying, "Now see, how I'm doing  
 It." Roaring like the sea, he took four arrows:  
*Brahma, Rudra, Kashyap and Bajrasira*  
 And shot them from his bow with all his might.  
 The twang of the bowstring rocked the earth.

The four arrows pierced into the monument  
Of one hundred and twenty-five *yojanas* wide  
And flushed out at the other end. The gods  
In heaven cheered him. King Chandra Naumi  
Arranged his daughter's marriage with  
Mahisasura on the fifth day of the bright  
Fortnight of Bhadrab, which was followed  
By celebrations. While leaving for his kingdom  
With Chandrabati, Mahisasura held  
Raktabirjya in deep embrace and sought  
His help to further the expansion of his empire.  
To Chandra Naumi he said, "Father! Allow  
Raktabirjya and Bidulaksha to accompany me."  
When he consented, he left with three *padmas*  
Of warriors and the king's sons. With great  
Pomp and ceremony, he entered his kingdom  
With Chandrabati; the pair looked like Kama  
And Rati. Raktabirjya and Bidulaksha were  
Given a spectacular reception.'

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## Mahisasura's Conquest of Jambu Island

'It was a Sunday, the full moon day  
Of Pausa, on which King Mahisa set out for  
Jambu island, accompanied by Chamara, Bemala,  
Kantimala, Raktabirjya, Bidulaksha and their  
Respective armies. Hearing from their ministers  
About the intrusion of the demons into their land,  
All the kings in Jambu island shook with fear.  
The demons went on a rampage in the places  
They passed by, devouring the cattle and the brahmins  
They found on their way. Looking as huge as  
The Mandara mountain, they came riding lions,  
Tigers and wild dogs. Raktabirjya, Bidulaksha,  
Chamara, Bemala and Kantimala, heavily drunk,  
Were babbling incoherently while drums, cymbals  
And many other instruments were being played.  
Brahma's boon had made them invincible;  
Their bodies were immune to the strike of arrows.  
As a supplement to drinks, they were eating the flesh

Of men, monkeys, horses and elephants. Having  
No fear of death, they invaded and occupied  
Kingdoms, such as Kashi, Kaushika, Kubuja  
And Kanauja. Some of the kings fled in fear;  
Others surrendered to Mahisa with all their wealth.  
The idols of the gods were destroyed, be they  
Of wood, stone or earth, *mandapas*, temples,  
Religious places and heritage sites were desecrated.  
They looked like a forest tossed by a storm. Kingdoms  
Such as Gandhara, Parijataka, Pali and Baraswati,  
Which came on their way to Sakhapur, were the most  
Affected. Padmalabha, the king of Sakhapur,  
Was a great devotee of Brahma.  
The messengers informed, "O Lord! Mahisasura  
Has arrived in your kingdom. After Singhala,  
He is eyeing Jambu. All the kings have fled  
To the forest, let alone confront him. If defeated,  
Where would we go?" Commanding his army  
To be on the alert for the impending peril,  
The king got onto the watchtower and looked around.  
What he saw at a distance was greatly disturbing.  
In surprise, he told his minister, "I see the sea  
Water has surged into the western territory,  
Submerging it." The minister replied, "What you  
Say sea water is, in fact, Mahisa's army, led  
By his commanders. The flags and *chamars*  
Look like storks in flight. The stamping  
Of their feet sound like the roar of the sea."  
In a few moments, Mahisa's army covered three  
*Yojanas* and surrounded the fort. Sealing  
The gates of the fort, the king warned the enemy  
Not to proceed further. Being a descendant



Of the sun, he was blessed with Brahma's boon  
 For his unflinching devotion to him. Ananta,  
 His ancestor, had a son named Matangasura.  
 Matanga's son was Trisira and Trisira's son  
 Was Dundubhi. Dundubhi had a son called  
 Dumala and grandson, Kankasura. Kankasura's  
 Son was Dhankasura, grandson, Bakasura  
 And great-grandson, Bikrasura. Bikrasura  
 Had a son named Sukrasura. Sukrasura's  
 Son was Sulabha and grandson, Padmalabha.  
 Padmalabha had two sons, Bajralabha  
 And Siulabha.

The king was still shouting from inside  
 The fort, addressing Mahisasura, "See, both  
 Of us are of the same clan, same lineage  
 And same zodiac sign." Bidulaksha hit back,  
 "We don't care all that. Surrender to us if you  
 Think us as your own." Kantimala, in anger,  
 Commanded the soldiers to demolish the gates  
 With crowbars. Suddenly, the soldiers  
 Inside the fort started firing arrows at them.  
 Scared of their war cry, Mahisa's soldiers  
 Began to step back. Seeing it, Raktabirjya  
 Rose to the occasion, joined by Bidulaksha,  
 Kantimala, Chamara and Bemala. Those  
 Five commanders were as fearless as they were  
 Formidable. The arrows aimed at them from  
 Inside the fort harmed them the least; they  
 Broke into pieces as soon as they hit them.  
 With renewed vigour, Mahisa's soldiers  
 Dismantled the ramparts with crowbars,

And, entering the fort, challenged Padmalabha's  
Army. A fierce battle ensued between the two  
Opposing armies, with the clanging of swords  
And maces. Padmalabha's army suffered  
Heavy casualties, eighty thousand of them  
Slain in a short time. The ground became muddy  
With blood; the Sakhapur fort was severely  
Damaged. The ramparts, watchtowers  
And the palace were razed to the dust. Nevertheless,  
The battle continued, neither of them willing  
To concede defeat. Padmalabha's soldiers  
Rained down arrows on the invaders to repel them.  
Mahisa's commanders, who could conquer  
Heaven effortlessly, put up a brave fight,  
With eighty thousand soldiers led by Chamara  
And Bemala. Furious, Kantimala hammered  
Most of the enemy forces to death; a river  
Of blood flowed in the Sakhapur fort. Seeing that  
Kantimala was causing havoc among his soldiers,  
The king challenged him with fifty-six crore  
Of soldiers. When he accused him of slaying  
His men unnecessarily, Kantimala told him,  
"Don't you know how mighty Mahisasura is?  
We conquered many kingdoms; no kings dared  
Face us. We've defeated all the kings of Jambu  
Island. One arrow is enough to finish you off.  
Come with us to Mahisasura. He'll be pleased  
To see you." Padmalabha replied, "After losing  
So many innocent men, do you think, I'll pray  
To him to draw up a peace treaty?" Saying so,  
He commanded his soldiers to charge at the enemy.  
Seeing this, Raktabirjya could not contain himself;

He held Padmalabha by the hair and killed him  
 With his sword. Then, he took his sons, Bajralabha  
 And Siulabha to King Mahisasura, and told him,  
 “Finding our soldiers slain in large numbers,  
 I killed King Padmalabha and brought his sons  
 To you. Though children, they’re quite learned.  
 They’re loyal to you. Let them rule Sakhapur  
 And remain obliged to you for all times to come.”  
 Appreciating his suggestion, Mahisasura  
 Ordained them as kings of Sakhapur.’

Glory to you, O Brahman, born from  
 Ugratara’s womb! O Creator of the universe!  
 You’re the greatest of all the gods, so you’re called  
 Mahadeva. Glory to you, O white-complexioned,  
 Mighty God! You’re as vast as the sky and  
 The greatest of all yogis. Having the appearance  
 Of Bhrikuti, you present yourself as Sadashiva.  
 You swallowed poison for the well-being of others.  
 You ride a bull and play the *dambaru*. You’ve  
 No form; you’re the embodiment of *maya*.  
 You burnt down Madana with fire from your  
 Eye. You’re adorned with cobras, O sacred Soul!  
 You’re the Lord of the universe; you’re Triambika.  
 You wear your hair in three braids; you’re  
 Adorned with sandalwood marks on your forehead.  
 You put on wooden sandals and carry Ganga  
 On your head. You’re the Maker of everyone’s  
 Destiny. You reside in every soul.  
 You’re as limitless as the sea.  
 You’re Maheswara. You’re the beginning.  
 May my devotion to you be steadfast.

O Nilakantha!

Sarala Das prays at your lotus-feet.

The story of Mahisasura's conquest

Of Jambu island comes to an end.

O Noble ones!

How can I explain the ways of God?

I'm unlearned, lacking in qualifications

To compose a scripture. I'm only retelling

What is said in *Ayurveda*. I adore Goddess

Hingula, whose abode is in Jankherpur, as

A garland of *tulsi* around my neck. I've no

Merit of my own. It's she who induced me

To write. She is the eternal source of life

And energy. A great *yogini* herself, she

Destroys the wicked and protects the righteous.

As my Saviour, she instilled in me the wisdom

To accomplish my task. Looking as white as

*Kunda* flowers, her eyes are like the blue

Water-lilies. She is mighty; she is benevolent

Katyayani. O Noble ones!

I'm too feeble to write a scripture.

Whatever she dictates me in my slumber

At night, I put it in words in the morning.

She helps the poor and the needy as

A mother does to her children. She is

The Redeemer of human sufferings.

She is *siddha* Sarala.

Sudramuni Sarala Das offers his prayers,

As holy as *tulsi*, at her feet.

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## Mahisasura's Battle with Shumbha and Nishumbha

King Parikshit told the sage, 'Mahisasura's  
Invasion wreaked havoc throughout Jambu island.  
Pray, tell me the events that followed it.' Sage  
Shuka said, 'Listen! I'm telling you all that is  
Recorded in the *Vishnu Purana*. Mahisasura  
Subjugated kingdoms, such as Karnata, Gauda,  
Malaba, Tirihuti, Chindhya, Mahachindhya,  
Nepal, Baraswati, Kodha, Malara, Kauri,  
Bangala, Bhota, Marahata, Lohita and Bhopal.  
Some of the kings were held captive; others  
Surrendered to him with all they possessed:  
Elephants, horses, warriors, sons and relatives.

O Parikshit! On the south coast of the sea,  
There was a city named Kulabati, ruled by  
Two powerful kings, Shumbha and Nishumbha.  
While they were young, they had been in  
Meditation under a banyan tree, praying

To Brahma. For one thousand years  
 They lived on iron dust and another  
 Thousand years on water and *tulsi*. In  
 The third phase that continued for one thousand  
 Years, they meditated until their bodies collapsed  
 On the ground. Five thousand years passed by;  
 Their bodies were buried under the soil, dust  
 And termites piled on it.  
 In the next one thousand years  
 Brushes covered the place, leaving no trace  
 Of their bodies. After nine thousand years  
 Of their meditation, Brahma appeared before  
 Them. "I'm Brahma," he told them. "Ask for  
 Any boon you wish to have." As he took some  
 Water from his *kamandalu* and sprinkled  
 It over them the ground Shumbha and Nishumbha  
 Sprang to their feet and demanded from him  
 The proof of identity. Brahma showed his real  
 Form, sitting in a yogic posture with the four  
 Vedas in his four hands, and a divine glow  
 Emanating from his body. Pleased to see it,  
 They asked him to take a vow before awarding  
 The boon. When it was done, they prayed to him,  
 "O Lord, the lotus-seated One! Bless us that  
 We'll become immortal. The deluge cannot  
 Harm us. We'll live throughout the four Ages."  
 "So be it," Brahma said and left for his abode.

Being informed about it, Lord Indra  
 Hurried to Narayana and told him, "Brahma  
 Has rewarded Shumbha and Nishumbha with  
 The boon of immortality. What will happen

To the earth if these wicked demons are allowed  
 To prosper?" Worried, the Wheel-bearer, disguised  
 Himself as a frail, sickly old man, lay  
 On the path to the bathing ghat, obstructing  
 The way for Shumbha and Nishumbha to pass.  
 Seeing the old man in such deplorable condition,  
 The demons asked him who he was. The stranger  
 Opened his eyes, but he was too weak to speak  
 Anything. When they asked again, he said,  
 "I'm the king of Ananta island, the son of king  
 Nirakara. When the fear of death overcame me,  
 I meditated on Brahma for one lakh and sixty-seven  
 Years. Now I realize that all my labour is wasted.  
 Taking a vow, Brahma assured me that I'll live  
 As long as he lives and that no one can defeat  
 Me in war, not even Brahma, Rudra and Vishnu.  
 It has been five years and six months since  
 I received the boon. My hard-earned boon,  
 Unfortunately, turned futile. Since that day  
 I've been suffering from an incurable disease.  
 My only son was killed; my two wives were  
 Drowned to death. I lost everything I had.  
 O Shumbha and Nishumbha! One who is born  
 Must die. Even Brahma himself cannot  
 Escape death. Being the Creator, he is unable  
 To save himself. A body made of flesh  
 And blood is liable to wear out. I was a victim  
 Of his fraud and guile. See, how I am made  
 To lie here on this jungle path! I beg you for  
 Your help. I frantically need a yogi who  
 Can cure me. O Mahatmas! Brahma, whose  
 Abode is Yashobantipur, is a fraud. He couldn't

Manage with one head, so he had four heads  
 More. God, in anger, had slapped him across  
 His face that dislodged one of his heads. You  
 Can imagine what a creator he might be, from  
 The simple fact that he is the only God whom no one  
 Worships. His vices are many; he had an immoral  
 Relationship with a prostitute who gave birth  
 To Sage Basistha. He is incomplete in himself.  
 He is not worthy to be worshipped. He is despicable.  
 How sad, you spent, a good part of your life  
 Worshipping him!" While saying so, he let out  
 A wail and dropped dead there.

Taken by surprise, the demons were suspicious  
 Of Brahma's truthfulness. At Badrikashram,  
 They started meditation again, praying to Brahma.  
 Days passed by, still Brahma did not appear  
 Before them. Enraged, they left for heaven  
 And searched for him there. Their presence in  
 Heaven caused a panic among the gods, some  
 Of whom fled in fear. Sensing serious trouble,  
 Indra informed Brahma, "Shumbha and Nishumbha  
 Are looking for you here. The gods including  
 Yama have left heaven. We've to prevent them  
 At any cost." Enraged, Brahma came out with his  
 Bow and met the demons, who, seeing him furious,  
 Prepared themselves to attack him. Dumbstruck,  
 Brahma stood quietly and, before he could decide  
 What to do, the demons slapped him across his face,  
 That hurt him severely. Collecting himself,  
 He pronounced a curse on them, "O wicked demons!  
 You lost your reason and hit me on my face.



May your heads be burnt into ashes.” Shocked,  
 They fell prostrate at his feet and prayed to him  
 To forgive them. They said, “We’ve committed  
 A great blunder by insulting you. We met an old man  
 Who told us you’ve deceived us. We are sorry.  
 Please forgive us.” Brahma knew that the old man  
 Was no other than Hari. He told them, “He has told  
 You a lie. Though I am the giver of boons,  
 It is Damodara who faces the consequence.  
 As I said you’ll live forever and defeat Brahma,  
 Vishnu and Rudra in war. One day you’ll occupy  
 Heaven. But when you touch each other’s  
 Head, you’ll be burnt into cinders.”

Returning to Kulabati, Shumbha and Nishumbha  
 Ruled their kingdom peacefully; they conquered  
 Many kingdoms and brought them under their sway.

One day, the messengers informed them,  
 “Mahisasura is ready to invade your kingdom.  
 He is the king of Singhala who has subjugated  
 Many kingdoms. Recently, he killed King Padmalabha  
 And ransacked Sakhapur. He has great commanders,  
 Such as Kantimala, Chamara, Bemala, Raktabirjya  
 And Dhumralochana.” Hearing this, Shumbha  
 And Nishumbha proceeded to repel the invaders  
 With an army that spread over five *yojanas*.  
 Their warriors were equipped with weapons, such as  
 Spears, arrows, swords, clubs, crowbars, spades  
 And axes. Their war horses, of Iranian origin,  
 Could run faster than the wind. Drawing near  
 Mahisa’s army, the troops of Kulabati raised

A war cry that frightened the enemy. Chamara, Bemala,  
 Kantimala and Bidulaksha were leading their army  
 From the front. A fierce battle ensued; the sound  
 Of clanging of swords filled the air. Bajranga  
 And Biraghanta, the commanders of Shumbha  
 And Nishumbha, launched an attack on Chamara  
 And Bemala. Bajranga slew many of Mahisa's  
 Soldiers who scattered like homeless birds,  
 Seeing it, Kantimala and Bidulaksha charged  
 At Biraghanta, while Raktabirja showered one lakh  
 Arrows on Bajranga in vain. With nine lakh soldiers,  
 Chamara and Bemala battled against Biraghanta's  
 Five lakh strong army. Biraghanta, using the arrow  
 Given to him by Parshurama in the Kamyak forest,  
 Wiped out one lakh of Mahisa's soldiers.  
 The battleground was soaked with blood  
 And the exchange of arrows darkened the sky.  
 In the meantime, Kantimala struck Biraghanta  
 With his mace that broke into two pieces.  
 On second attempt, he saw his mace was  
 Crushed into dust. As Biraghanta's attack  
 Gained momentum, Mahisa's soldiers retraced  
 Five *yojanas* back. Mahisasura retreated  
 To Vindhyagiri hills. Seeing the enemy dispersed,  
 Shumbha and Nishumbha returned to Kulabati.'

Glory to God, the blue-complexioned one!  
 Since the day Sribaccha kicked at your chest,  
 You have been called Sribacchi. A lover  
 Of devotees, you are the enchanter of the *gopis*.  
 O Lord! Your creation is incomprehensible.  
 I wish to sing your glory all my life. This earthly

Life is a noose around my neck. It's you who can  
 Unhitch me. Driven by self-pride, I revel in  
 Falsehood. Remove the illusion that shrouds  
 My mind. Day and night I think on you,  
 O Redeemer of my soul! Brahma, Indra, the Moon,  
 The Sun and all the gods are like the beads  
 Of the garland around your neck.  
 I bow to you, O Narayana! In this transitory  
 World, you're the one who is eternal. O Lord!  
 You and your creation are inseparable from  
 Each other like the moon and the *chakora*.  
 I could feel your presence by dedicating myself  
 To you with single-minded devotion.  
 I chant your name day and night.  
 The maimed, the helpless, the ignorant  
 And the sinners – all of them achieved salvation  
 Only by chanting your name. Thus says  
 Sudramuni Sarala Das, wearing a *tulsi* garland  
 And bowing at your sacred feet.

O Learned ones!  
 Remember, Sarala Chandi of Jankherpur  
 Is the only Saviour!  
 Once, wishing to see Lord Vishnu,  
 Sage Manu went to Vaikuntha, but Jaya  
 And Bijaya, who stood watch at the gate,  
 Did not let him in. He requested them again  
 And again with folded hands, but it was in  
 Vain. Seeing his frail body, they gave him  
 A push that sent him hurling in the air  
 Nine thousand *yojanas* away. Collecting himself,  
 He returned to heaven again. Singing from

The Vedas, he requested them to allow him go  
 Inside. Instead, they let out a stream  
 Of abuse at him. Flying into a fury, the sage  
 Cursed them, 'Being mere gatekeepers of heaven,  
 You dared hit a sage, as frail and weak  
 As I am. May you be born as demons in your  
 Next birth.' Shocked at the curse, they  
 Prayed to him, 'O Brahma's son! O Manu!  
 We committed a great blunder not knowing  
 Who you are. Kindly tell us how to expiate  
 Our sin.' The sage told them, 'For your offence,  
 You'll be born as demons. You can restore  
 Your position by your devotion to Vishnu.  
 You'll be Krishna's enemy and return  
 To Vaikuntha after three births. In your  
 First birth, you'll be known as Hiranya  
 And Hiranaksha, in which you'll kidnap  
 Vishnu's consort. In the second, you'll be  
 Ravana and Kumbhakarna. You'll kidnap  
 Sita and Sri Rama will chop your head.  
 In the third, you'll be born as Dantabakra  
 And Sisupala. You'll kidnap Rukmini  
 And be slain by Narayana. For all  
 The three births you'll be kidnappers  
 Of women, before you return to Vaikuntha.'

Cursed by Manu, Jaya and Bijaya  
 Were born as demons. With their disappearance,  
 The gates of Vaikuntha remained unattended.  
 Being informed about Manu's curse, Vishnu  
 Sent for Brahma's son. He held Manu  
 Responsible for it and told him, 'The punishment

Meted out to my gatekeepers is much greater  
Than their crime. For the injustice you did  
To them, you'll be born as man on the earth.'  
Manu said benignly, 'In obedience to your  
Command, I'll be born as man. In my first  
Birth, I'll please Goddess Girija and hear  
Vishnu's story from her. In my second birth,  
I'll be known as Kalidas who will receive  
The blessings of Saraswati. In the third,  
I'll be Sarala Das who will devote himself  
To Sarala Chandi. With her blessings I'll write  
The *Ramayana* first, then the *Mahabharata*  
And thirdly, *Sri Bhagavata*.'

Thus says Sudramuni Sarala Das, praying  
At the feet of Sarala Chandi of Jankherpur.

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## Mahisasura Loses the Battle

‘Listen, O Parikshit!

May your sins be redeemed by listening

To *Sri Bhagavata*.

When it became morning, both the armies  
Started for the battlefield, Shumbha and Nishumbha  
From Kulabati city and Mahisa from the Vindhyagiri  
Mountain. The battle ensued; a rain of arrows  
Poured down from the skies. Raktabirjya,  
Biraghanta, Chamara and Bemala led the attack,  
Brandishing their maces. Seeing Raktabirjya  
Full of fire, Shumbha and Nishumbha hit him  
With their unwieldy maces. Raktabirjya  
And Shumbha, holding each other’s arm  
Boxed and wrestled, each trying to outclass the other.  
Raktabirjya fell to the ground and passed out.  
Next, Shumbha thrashed Chamara with his mace  
That sent him sprawling onto the ground, unconscious.  
Kantimala rushed to the spot to retaliate, but

Was soon overpowered. Seeing his commanders  
 Beaten, one after another, Mahisa himself took over  
 The responsibility. In a tearing rage, Shumbha  
 And Nishumbha, as huge as the Mandara  
 Mountain, stretched their  
 Hands to catch Mahisa, like Rahu attempting  
 To swallow the sun. Jayasingha, Bajrasingha  
 And Mahisasura, the threesome, unitedly combated  
 With them, raining down arrows on Shumbha,  
 Who, with his mace, broke Mahisa's chariot  
 Into pieces. A fresh battle started between Shumbha  
 And Raktabirjya; the earth shook under  
 The weight of their feet. Mahisa attacked Nishumbha,  
 But while hitting him, his mace broke and fell  
 Into pieces. Seeing Shumbha running towards  
 Him aggressively, Mahisa decided to pull out  
 Of the battle. Shumbha blocked his way  
 And asked, "Who are you? Why did you trespass  
 On my land? Don't you know the sun and the wind  
 Dare not intrude into my kingdom? How could  
 You enter here?" Mahisa replied, "I'm the king  
 Of Singhala, my kingdom spreads over forty lakh  
 Yojanas. I conquered the islands, such as Karancha,  
 Kunja and Chandra. Raktabirjya, Chamara  
 And Bemala are the kings who surrendered  
 To me. Sage Narada told me about your land  
 And was full of praise for it. That tempted  
 Me to invade it. Now that I'm defeated,  
 I surrender to you." Pleased, Shumbha embraced  
 Him, and as a sign of friendship, offered him  
 The kingdom of Kulabati.

Days wore on. One day Narada, the Messenger  
Of heaven, appeared there, clad in white and singing  
And dancing. He used to speak the truth, but in  
A twisted manner, for which he was liked by all.'

Glory to Narayana, the Saviour of mankind!  
You've no beginning, nor end. You're the Creator  
Of all living beings. Brahma, who is Holiness  
Incarnate, is born from you. It is you who instructs  
Me to write. Vyasa wrote down your words  
And I followed him. You're the source of all wisdom.  
You're Jagannath! For redeeming the sins  
Of Kali Yuga, your face has turned black.  
One who thinks on you, is free from all sins.  
Sarala Chandi of Jankherpur, Krupajal's  
Daughter, and Lord Shiva's consort, inspires me  
To write, and I do so by hearing from Vyasa.  
Thus says Sarala Das, bowing at the feet  
Of the benevolent Goddess. Forgive my ignorance.  
O Learned Ones! Give up all distractions;  
Keep chanting Krishna's name. Talking about him  
Or hearing about him will lead you on the path  
Of righteousness and fulfil all your wishes.

'Sage Narada adorned his seat and enquired  
About everyone. Greatly impressed by the city  
Of Kulabati, he told Shumbha and Nishumbha,  
"Your kingdom is beautiful and prosperous. No other  
Demon king has been able to build a city such as this.  
It's well protected by four high mountains: Ratnagiri  
In the east, Singhagiri in the west, Kundagiri in  
The south and Vindhyaagiri in the north. No other city



Can be equal to it in majesty and richness, except  
For Amaravati. But it doesn't have the four things  
That Amaravati has. They are Airavata, the elephant;  
Rambha, the *apsara*; Uccaihsraba, the horse;  
And Parijata, the flower."

So saying, the sage left, but his words  
Kept haunting the demon kings. "We've achieved  
Everything with our might, but not these four  
Things the sage had mentioned," they thought.  
In order to get them as soon as possible,  
They ordered the ministers, "Send our messengers  
To Amaravati immediately with our letter."

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## Mahisasura's Letter to Indra

“Glory to Sun-god, Kashyap's son, who has  
No beginning, nor end; who is the source  
Of eternal joy and the Lord of the fourteen worlds.  
Mahisasura of Simhika's family, the Light of Rahu's  
Clan, prays at your feet.

Letter from the Monarch of all the kingdoms:  
The netherworld and all that the eyes can see,  
Blessed by Brahma, Singhala his abode, the Lord  
Of the gods, men, *gandharvas*, *dakshas*, *kinnars*,  
Planets, Yama's messengers, beasts and demons,  
The ruler of all *dikpalas* and all castes. He is Garuda  
For the world of *nagas*, the omnipotent, the epitome  
Of the three basic attributes of the creation, and the master  
Of scriptures and warfare. Being mightier with Brahma's  
Boon, he gained authority over Yama, King of Death.  
He conquered kingdoms, such as Jambu, Singhala,  
Koshala, Chandra, the nine islands and the seven seas.  
He defeated kings, such as Raktabirjya, Chamara,

Bemala, Biraghanta, Dhumralochana, Kantimala,  
 Chanda, Munda, Shumbha and Nishumbha.  
 He has taken control over Chudanga, Kashi, Kaushika,  
 Nepal, Pasupatra, Gauda, Gajana, Tihudi, Malab,  
 Gujjar, Magadha, Macchya, Sakha, Saurashtra, Kanchi,  
 Mahendra, Marahata, Bijantaka, Yamuna, Saveri, etc.  
 He is Yogi of *yogis*; he is Managovinda.  
 Mahisasura commands Indra of Amaravati  
 To present himself before him with Airavata,  
 Rambha, Parijata and Uccaihsrava."

Shumbha and Nishumbha ordered  
 Two of his messengers, Sahasra and Prasasta,  
 To carry the letter to heaven and fetch Indra forthwith.  
 With the king's letter, they set out for Amaravati.

Sensing the arrival of the demons, Narada  
 Informed Indra, "O Lord! Mahisasura has sent  
 His messengers here to fetch you." Indra showed  
 Least concern about it, but it made his inside  
 Twist in alarm. He felt a tremor of panic.  
 Just then, both the demons reached there  
 And shouted at him, "O Indra! Mahisasura,  
 The Lord of the three worlds, commands you  
 To leave your throne and meet him at once".  
 Their hurtful behaviour was too much for Indra  
 To take in. One of the *gandharvas* present there  
 Held the demons by the hair and struck them with  
 An axe that sent their bodies sprawling  
 Onto the ground, cut in half. Shocked at  
 What happened, Narada asked, "Why did you kill  
 The messengers? Killing a messenger

Is as great a sin as killing a brahmin." To him  
 Indra replied firmly, "I'm the king of the gods.  
 I'm Jambubhedi as I killed Jambu, the demon.  
 Who should I fear?"

O Parikshit! On a Sunday, the second day  
 Of the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra,  
 Shumbha and Nishumbha held a meeting  
 Of their ministers and courtiers in the presence  
 Of Mahisasura's minister, Andhaka, who could  
 Tell the past, present and future.' King Parikshit  
 Asked the sage, 'How is it that Mahisasura, the king  
 Of nine islands, chose a blind man as his minister?  
 What is the rationale behind it?' The sage  
 Explained, 'Andhaka was the grandson of Raksha  
 And Bhaksha, the son of Praheti and the brother  
 Of Sajabali. He was brought up by Mahisasura's  
 Mother in his childhood. Displeased with Mahisa's  
 Wicked behaviour, he once cautioned him,  
 "You've earned a great fortune with your might.  
 Your wrongful actions will bring your end soon."  
 Enraged, Mahisa plucked out his eyes. In severe  
 Pain, he rolled on the ground, praying to God for  
 Help. Moved by his prayer, Lord Shiva arrived  
 There, riding a bull. He asked him, "What happened?  
 I couldn't stand your painful cry. So I came here."  
 Andhaka replied, "I'm the son of Praheti of the clan  
 Of Raksha and Bhaksha and the great-grandson  
 Of Suraksha. I'm Mahisa's uncle. Objecting to  
 His wicked manners, I advised him to correct himself.  
 In anger, he plucked out my eyes." The Lord  
 Consoled him, "Both of us are called Birupaksha.

So, you're my namesake. That makes us  
 Friends to each other. I'll restore your eyesight."  
 Andhaka interrupted, "I don't want to see what  
 He does or not. I'll be happy to live as a blind man.  
 If you're so kind, grant me the power to see the  
 Past, present and future, even without eyesight.  
 That'll qualify me to be his minister." Pleased,  
 The Lord granted him an all-encompassing vision,  
 That nothing will hide from his view. This is  
 How he came to be known as Andhaka.

Shumbha and Nishumbha asked Andhaka,  
 "Tell us the news of our messengers who had been  
 To Amaravati long ago." Andhaka replied, "Incensed  
 By Mahisa's command, Indra killed both of them."  
 Fuming with anger, Shumbha and Nishumbha  
 Started for heaven in a chariot pulled by  
 One thousand lions. Being informed of their  
 Arrival by Narada, Indra, fully armed, rode  
 Airavata and proceeded with other gods to repel  
 The demons. As they met with each other,  
 Indra cried out, "O Shumbha and Nishumbha!  
 You rule the earth; I rule heaven. We are brothers.  
 Why are you hostile to me?" The demons replied,  
 "O Indra! Mahisasura is the conquerer  
 Of the world. True, the gods and the demons are  
 Brothers. But you made our relationship miserable  
 By killing Jambu, the demon. My king had sent  
 Two of his messengers to you. You killed them  
 Without any reason. How dare you do it?  
 We won't return unless you hand us over  
 Airavata, Parijata, Rambha and Uccaihsrava.

You've committed a grievous error by killing  
 The messengers. We are demons, still we are scared  
 Of doing anything unholy. People do such things  
 When their end is near." To them, Indra said,  
 "I'm the king of gods. Who do I care?" Shumbha  
 Warned him, "You're choosing a wrong path.  
 Will you obey Mahisasura's orders or not?"  
 "Let me talk to Brahma first. I'm Indra because  
 Of him, you're great because of his blessing."  
 So saying, he left for Brahma's abode. Soon  
 The demons occupied Indra's throne  
 And kidnapped an *apsara* called Kamasena.

Finding Brahma in deep meditation,  
 Indra had to wait for nine *dandas*, which was  
 Equal to nine thousand years for the gods.  
 In the meantime, the demons had taken control  
 Of Indra's abode and continued to rule heaven.  
 All the planets and *dikpalas* were at their service,  
 Doing errands for them. Since Yama had fled  
 In fear, there was no fear of death any longer.  
 No one died on the earth; everyone was happy  
 And fearless. Surprised at the changes,  
 Mahisa asked Andhaka, "How come, the gods  
 Are ruling the heaven so successfully?"  
 Andhaka replied, "When Narada told them  
 To fetch four things from heaven, such as  
 Airavata, Rambha, Parijata and Uccaihsraba,  
 Shumbha and Nishumbha sent messengers  
 To Indra to get them. Indra killed the messengers,  
 And to avenge their death, Shumbha and Nishumbha  
 Occupied Amaravati and drove away Indra.

At their command, it only rains at night. Yama  
 Has fled heaven, so no one dies these days,  
 The sages and brahmins, being immortal, praise  
 Your lordship with respect.” Delighted, Mahisa  
 Took off his crown, earrings and necklaces  
 And ordered Chamara and Bemala to offer those  
 To Shumbha and Nishumbha for their spectacular  
 Achievement. Chamara and Bemala, followed  
 By nine lakh soldiers, reached Amaravati. Offering Mahisa’s  
 presents to Shumbha and Nishumbha,  
 They told them, “Mahisa has been pleased to offer  
 You his ornaments in appreciation of your  
 Brave work. He has also asked you to continue  
 As kings of heaven.”

King Parikshit, praying at the sage’s feet,  
 Implored, ‘Lord Indra had left for Brahma’s  
 Abode in haste. What did Brahma say to Indra?’  
 Shuka replied, ‘Listen! After his meditation was  
 Over, Brahma opened his eyes.’ Parikshit interrupted,  
 ‘Why does Brahma meditate? He is the Creator  
 And the wisest of all. Why should he meditate?’  
 The sage replied, ‘Listen carefully. He has created  
 Four kinds of living beings, eighty-four lakhs  
 In number. Every day he has to look after them.  
 It’s his duty to ensure that everything runs smoothly.  
 He has four faces and eight eyes; he uses them  
 For this purpose. For all this, he requires  
 An eighteen-*danda* meditation every day.’

Glory to the Progenitor of gods, the Creator  
 Of crores of Universe! He uses his left head for

Singing *Atharvaveda*, the back one for *Rigveda*,  
 The one at the right for *Samaveda* and the front one  
 For *Jajurveda*. He is Brahman himself. Thus says  
 Sudramuni Sarala Das, bowing at Brahma's feet.

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Sage Shuka, Vyasa's son, narrated all that  
 Happened between Brahma and Indra, as told  
 By Brahma to Vyasa.

'Seeing Indra in Brahma's abode, the *gandharvas*  
 And the *apsaras* informed him, "Once you left  
 Amaravati, Shumbha and Nishumbha took possession  
 Of your abode. They kidnapped two of your *apsaras*:  
 Kamasena and Mohini. Chamara and Bemala have  
 Joined them with an army of demons." His meditation  
 Ended, Brahma opened his eyes and saw Indra  
 Bowing at his feet. When he asked him what  
 Brought him there, the king of Amaravati said,  
 "O Lord! It seems you don't care for us at all.  
 You made me the king of heaven. Let me inform  
 You that Mahisasura, Kapilasingha's son,  
 Has occupied Amaravati. He had sent his messengers  
 To me demanding Airavata, Parijata, Rambha  
 And Uccaihsraba. When I refused, they insulted  
 Me with hurtful words. In anger, I killed both  
 The messengers. Seeking revenge, Shumbha  
 And Nishumbha arrived here with a large army.  
 They turned me out of my abode and kidnapped  
 Two *apsaras*: Kamasena and Mohini. Empowered  
 By your boon, Mahisa became the monarch  
 Of the three worlds." Saying so, he took off his royal



Robes and jewellery and put it before him.  
 Brahma advised him, "Let Shumbha and Nishumbha  
 Be in Amaravati. You stay in my abode with  
 The *gandharvas* and the *apsaras*."

It was a Saturday, the sixth day of the bright  
 Fortnight of the month of Bhadrab. Shumbha  
 And Nishumbha, with their army, proceeded  
 To Alakapuri to carry out a raid on it, Chamara  
 And Bemala following them with their troops.  
 Hearing the voice of Providence that warned him  
 Of the arrival of the demons, Kubera was worried.  
 "I can never beat them in war," he thought. With  
 Some precious jewellery and robes meant for  
 The coronation of the gods, he left his abode.  
 After robbing Alakapuri, the demons chased  
 Kubera who was running away. Seeing that  
 He is being followed, Kubera threw the robes  
 And jewellery and disappeared into Nairutapur.  
 Collecting those things, Chamara and Bemala  
 Posted some guards in Alakapuri and returned.

Arriving at Jenabati, they met Mahisasura,  
 Laying the booty out before him. It included  
 The jewels collected from the sea when, years ago,  
 The sea was being churned. Mahisa adorned  
 Himself with the robes and ornaments that Indra  
 Used to wear, and the rest, he gave away among  
 His commanders. Raktabirjya, Biraghanta  
 And Bidulaksha put the necklaces of the gods  
 Around their necks. All of Mahisa's followers  
 Revelled in drinking, dancing and playing musical

Instruments. At Mahisa's command, the charioteer  
 Decorated the chariot with nine kinds of gems  
 And yoked lions to it. As Mahisa adorned  
 The chariot, it flew into the sky at the speed  
 Of the wind. The gods, *gandharvas*, *dakshas*  
 And *kinnars*, whoever were there in heaven fled  
 In fear. With his followers, Mahisasura entered  
 Amaravati, where he was received warmly.  
 Shumbha and Nishumbha offered him the coronation  
 Attire of Indra. They offered gems to Ratkabirjya,  
 Andhaka, Biraghanta, Kantimala, Chanda, Munda,  
 Bidulaksha, Bhaskar, Surabara, Bhagava,  
 Birabahu, Lohasura, Kanka, Dhanka, Kalanala,  
 Bahu, Subahu, Chanda, Prachanda, Umura,  
 Dumura, Sukha, Durmukha, Gila, Mahagila,  
 Tadaka and Bimukha. Praising Shumbha  
 And Nishumbha, Mahisa said, "It's for you that  
 The entire heaven became ours." He ordained  
 Kalaketu as the king of Sanjibanipura,  
 Biraghanta became the king of Hemabantapura;  
 The charge of Hiranyagarvapura was left  
 To Bidulaksha and Chamara and Bemala  
 Became the custodians of Alakapuri.

Realizing the gravity of the situation,  
 Narada informed Brahma, "Mahisasura has captured  
 The entire heaven. He has placed Chanda and Munda  
 In charge of the nether world and Jalataranga  
 Is made the king of Barunapura. Thus, the positions,  
 Earlier held by the gods, are now gone to the hands  
 Of the demons." Shocked to learn that the Moon,  
 The Sun, the Wind and Baruna were turned out

Of their abode, Brahma decided to meet Narayana  
 With all the gods. They set out for the Milky Sea:  
 Brahma on a swan, Indra on Airavata, Yama  
 On a buffalo, Shiva on a bull, the Wind on a deer,  
 Brihaspati on a swan and Kamadeva on  
 Uccaihsraba. Their consorts too joined them.  
 Thirty-three crores of gods reached the Milky Sea  
 Where Narayana lay supinely on the coils  
 Of the great cobra, Birajachakra, Lakshmi  
 And Narmada sitting beside him. On Brahma's  
 Request, Narmada played her *veena* with  
 Sweet notes to awake Narayana. Arising  
 From sleep, he wiped his eyes and found the gods,  
 Lying prostrate before him. There was a gloomy  
 Silence all around; despair was writ large  
 On every face. When he wanted to know why  
 They were there, Brahma said politely, "You forgot  
 All of us, lying here, free from worries". Vishnu  
 Replied, "Being the Creator, who do you fear?"  
 The gods complained, "The atrocity of the demons  
 Bear heavily on us. The Earth is bleeding through  
 Her nose." The Fire, the Moon and the Sun added,  
 "Mahisasura's oppression has become too much  
 To take in. He usurped our kingdom and ill-treated  
 Us. The demons took away our *apsaras*. They are  
 Ill-advised by Andhaka. Kubera fled in fear.  
 They sucked Baruna's abode dry. They robbed  
 The kingdom of *nagas*. We suffered immensely  
 And you did nothing to protect us.  
 Finding no other alternative, we came  
 To you, seeking help."

Annoyed, Sri Hari said, "O Brahma!  
 Why did you grant such a boon without considering  
 Its consequence? O Shiva! You're called Tripurari  
 As you have killed Tripura, the demons. Why couldn't  
 You eliminate Shumbha and Nishumbha?"  
 Shiva replied, "Pleased with Mahisa's devotion,  
 Brahma granted them the boon that  
 None of the gods, men, *nagas*, monkeys,  
 Bears and demons will take their life. Neither Yama  
 Nor the deluge will put them to death. The Wind won't  
 Drift them away and the Fire won't burn them.  
 The anger of the gods and the curses of sages  
 Won't impact them. O Lord! I'm undone!"  
 Narayana said, "It means he won't die  
 In my hands. The demons know it well; so  
 They are not afraid of me." Hearing this, the Earth  
 Cried bitterly, "How I wish I sank into  
 The netherworld! Let the world perish."  
 The Moon and the Sun refused  
 To shine in the sky; they would prefer to stay  
 In the Milky Sea and serve at Narayana's feet.  
 The Wind said, "I'll stop blowing; let the living beings  
 Suffocate to death." Looking at Narayana's face,  
 All the gods wailed and wept. They were saying,  
 "You're our only Saviour. We have become  
 Slaves in our own homes. We have been robbed  
 Of our power and position." A howl of grief  
 Filled the night air.

It was the eighth day of the dark fortnight  
 Of Ashwin. It was late evening when Mahisa  
 Disguised as a buffalo, was skulking at the foot

Of the Meru mountain. Suddenly he heard  
 Narayana's voice coming from the mountain.  
 He was conspiring with the gods to kill  
 Mahisasura. In a mad fit, he struck the mountain  
 With his horns that made it crumble.  
 This infuriated the thirty-three  
 Crore of gods present there; their faces  
 Turned red and their eyes glinted in anger.  
 The fire from their eyes spread in all directions,  
 As if the seven worlds were in flames.  
 Scared, Mahisa retraced his steps.  
 He told Shumbha and Nishumbha,  
 "Do you know, Uncle, what the gods did? While  
 Travelling in the dark, I heard them planning  
 For my death. Command the demons to attack  
 The gods mercilessly." Shumbha and Nishumbha  
 Replied that the gods had taken shelter in Brahma's  
 Abode. "Demolish Brahma's abode, then appoint  
 Chanda and Munda rulers of Yashobantipura."  
 Shumbha and Nishumbha protested, "For all that  
 You achieved, you owe it to Brahma. How'll you  
 Go against him for no reason?" Mahisasura  
 Roared out, "If he is our father, how does he think  
 Ill of us? A father, unable to protect his family,  
 Deserves to die." "Where did the gods go from  
 The Meru mountain?" they asked. Mahisa replied,  
 "I don't know. I left the place at the sight of fire."  
 Hearing this, Chanda and Munda decided to go  
 To Meru mountain and launch an assault  
 On Brahma's abode.

On second thoughts, Mahisasura decided  
 To consult Andhaka before taking any measure

Against Brahma. Returning to his kingdom,  
 He told Andhaka about all that had happened.  
 Andhaka told him, "You've done a grievous  
 Mistake. You usurped Amaravati and carried away  
 Lakshmi on your head. Your ancestors, such as  
 Tripura, Taraka, Raksha and Bhaksha, never  
 Invaded heaven." Hearing this, Mahisa was  
 Scared, but sported his pride as usual. He ordered  
 His commanders, Sindhu and Upasindhu,  
 To guard the north coast. He cautioned them,  
 "In case the gods attempt to hide in the sea,  
 Catch hold of them." In addition, he deployed  
 Jalataranga inside the sea. He asked  
 Bidulaksha to suck the Milky Sea dry. He sent  
 Chamara and Bemala to empty the Nila Sea.  
 He asked Krutantaka to suck the waters  
 Of the Ikshu Sea. He commanded Mukha  
 And Durmukha, the two brothers, to empty  
 The Kshara Sea. Chanda and Munda were  
 Asked to suck all the water of the Salt Sea.  
 This way, he ordered his commanders  
 To ensure that all the seas were dried up.  
 He decided to attack Brahma's abode on  
 The tenth day of the month.'

Hearing this, the king of Kuru's clan asked  
 The sage, 'What did the gods do when the place  
 Was ablaze?' Sage Shuka replied, 'Listen to  
 The story of Sri Durga now. That will wash away  
 All your sins. To propitiate God of Fire, the gods  
 Recited *mantras*, each of them contributing  
 Their inherent powers to it. The fires broke out  
 In a massive shape, spreading across heaven that

Forced the demons to return to Jenabatipura,  
All the gods prayed to God of Fire in chorus:

“Glory to you, O Fire!  
Your power and purity are well proven.  
Your flames touch the top of the universe.  
O Mahatma! You’re impartial, terrible  
And full of energy. You’ve no beginning, nor  
End. You can easily penetrate heaven. You’re  
God of gods, formless and incomprehensible.  
You make the impossible possible. You’re *siddha*.  
You’re in a state of ecstatic frenzy. You’re  
Merciful to the impoverished and the needy.  
You’re a column of nectar that pierces the sky.  
All gods are born from you. You’re uncommon.  
There is no end to your appetite. You can consume  
The whole world, and still be hungry. You’re kind.  
You’re the Creation. You’re Brahman.  
Your benevolence will continue as long as the sun  
And the moon exist. You live in the bowels  
Of the earth, nether regions and heaven. You’re  
The Lord of all. You fear none. You’re above  
All chants and *mantras*. You can make yourself  
Invisible in a moment. You’re self-born,  
Worshipped by gods and sages. Ayurveda,  
Jyotirveda, Dhanurveda, Sisurveda and Gayatri  
Are the five armours that make you invincible.  
You destroy creation after creation effortlessly  
And also recreate them. You’ve no girdle, but  
Only a belly, large enough to contain the Creation.  
You’re Narayana. You’re the Sun. You’re Baiswanara.  
You’re the wisest and the holiest. You’re Yogi

Of yogis. You're born from the sea. O Lord!  
 You're the most ancient of all gods. You're known  
 For your forbearance. When Vishnu and Shiva  
 Are worshipping you, who am I to describe  
 Your greatness?"

Sage Shuka said, 'Listen, King Parikshit!  
 Moved by Brahma's prayer, his sister appeared  
 From the roaring fire, sparkling like a gem. Her  
 Radiance belied her beauty. She had one head,  
 Two legs and one thousand hands. She was Katyayani;  
 She was Kamakshi; she was Tarini, the great Vaishnavi,  
 Calm and gratified. Seeing her gigantic figure,  
 The gods were scared. Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswar  
 And the Moon lay prostrate before her in respect.  
 Thirty-three crore of gods bowed at her feet.

Her forehead was made of the fire of  
 Brahma; her face of that of Narayana;  
 Her teeth of Maheswar's; eyes of God of Fire,  
 Nose of Indra; radiance of her face of Aditya;  
 Tongue of the Moon, cheeks of Yama; chest of Kubera;  
 Armpit of God, the Formless; navel of Sanaka;  
 The folds on her abdomen of Ashwini Kumar;  
 The nose-rings of Yama and Brihaspati; thighs  
 Of Prajapati; feet of Ananta Basuki; toes of  
 The nine planets and Bhrigu; fingers of *kunda*  
 Buds; the back of Hemavanta; the hair of the stars;  
 The belly of Baruna; the water in her body of Rain;  
 Her one thousand hands of forty-nine winds;  
 Her words of Yama and her holiness of Vaishnavas.



She was as wise as Brahma; as enchanting  
 As Kamadeva; as warlike as Krishna; as learned  
 As Brihaspati; as boastful as Indra; as glorious  
 As the Moon; as radiant as the Sun; as cruel as Yama;  
 As forbearing as the Earth; as swift as the Wind;  
 As sacred as the Meru; as charming as the Rain;  
 As solemn as Baruna, as captivating as Parvati  
 And as resolute as Kumara.

Listen, O King! She was born from the fire,  
 Contributed by each of the gods; her nature was  
 An amalgam of their attributes. Suddenly  
 The voice of Providence was heard from above:  
 She is the one who will save the world from  
 The powers of evil, so she is named Durga.

Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar prayed to her  
 With folded hands, "Glory to you, O Katyayani,  
 The Benevolent One! You restore order after violence.  
 You're the epitome of goodness,  
 And the Saviour of mankind.  
 O Durga! O Mangala!  
 You protect us from evil."

How can an ignorant child as I am, describe  
 You whom the gods worship? O Noble ones!  
 You learnt how she was born. By pleasing her,  
 You can achieve righteousness, riches, fulfilment  
 Of wishes and salvation. Chant her name,  
 And your misfortunes are removed and you're free  
 From the bondage of time. She will save you  
 From the fear of disease and death. You can

Ward the evil spirits off. Those who are issueless,  
 Will be blessed with children. Worship her  
 From the bright fortnight of Ashwin, till  
 The ninth day. She will bless you with  
 A long life, wealth and son – everything.  
 O Mother Durga! Only you can save us from  
 Greed, attachment and worldly worries.  
 O Mother! Reside in me all my life.  
 Thus says Sudramuni Sarala Das, praying  
 For her mercy.

x x x

‘O Parikshit! Pleased with the devotion  
 Of the gods, the Goddess, calm and composed, asked,  
 “O gods! You pray to me so benignly. Tell me,  
 What are you worrying about?” Vishnu motioned  
 For Brahma to speak. Who, with folded hands,  
 Gave a full account of the inside story.

“Mother! Ten of the sixty daughters of Daksha  
 Prajapati, were married to Yama. They were  
 Tanu, Bhanu, Medha, Sraddha, Sruti, Mruti,  
 Shanti, Sumedha, Buddhi and Trusti. Uma married  
 Shiva and I married Savitri. Nirabati was married  
 To Baruna; Swaha and Sudha to Fire. Tara  
 And Hara married Brihaspati and Kubera  
 Respectively. To Aditya, Daksha offered Samjna  
 And to the Moon, twenty-seven of his daughters.  
 Hema did not marry; she spent her life  
 As a *yogini*. Kashyap married  
 Thirteen of them, such as Diti, Aditi, Binata,

Kadru, Kala, Anala, Gandharvi, Daksha, Raksha,  
 Arasti, Gruhija, Suravi and Simhika. To Aditi  
 The gods were born and to Diti, Pabana and Sampati,  
 Kadru gave birth to snakes and Binata to Garuda.  
*Gandharvas* were born to Gandharvi, and *dakshas*  
 And *kinnars* to Daksha. Raksha gave birth to  
 Quadrupeds, such as elephants, horses, bears  
 And deer. To Kala, Kalapurusa was born and to Anala,  
 The mountains. Suravi gave birth to the cattle  
 And Gruhija to the best of men. To Arasti were born  
 The untouchables and to Simhika, a son called Rahu.  
 Aditya chopped him in half for his wickedness.  
 The lower part of his body was named Ketu.  
 Ketu's son, Jambu, while trying to capture the Sun,  
 Was slain by Indra. Jambu's son was Hiranyakashyapa  
 And grandsons, Raksha and Bhaksha.

In Satya Yuga, a series of fights went on between  
 The gods and the demons, in which many demons  
 Were slain by Narayana. They included Heti and  
 Praheti, the sons of Raksha and Bhaksha, Bajranga's  
 Son, Hiranyakachapa, grandson, Bajrakapacha,  
 His sons, Andhaka and Tripura. Tripura's son,  
 Sambu was killed by Kamadeva for kidnapping  
 Bedamati. Sambu's son, Jalataranga died  
 In the hands of Vishnu. Sankhasura, Jalataranga's  
 Son, made off with the Vedas written by me. Vishnu,  
 In the guise of a fish, took his life. Jagannath,  
 Disguised as a tortoise, killed Sankhasura's  
 Son, Abani. Abani's son, Hiranaksha, was  
 Slain by a boar, the incarnation of Vishnu.  
 His son, Keshi, was put to death by Keshaba.

He also killed Keshi's son, Amaya. Vishnu,  
 Incarnated as Narasimha, killed Amaya's  
 Son, Hiranyakashyapa. Krishna killed his son,  
 Bailochana, by tricking him in the guise of a woman.  
 Incarnated as Bamana, Vishnu trampled Bali,  
 Bailochana's son, to the netherworld. Bali's son,  
 Maya was killed by Krishna in a battle.  
 Hanumanta killed Maya's son, Amaya. Amaya's  
 Son, Tadakasura was slain by Karttikeya.  
 Tadaka's son was Lohasura, his son was  
 Bajrasingha and grandson, Kapilasingha.  
 Mahisasura is Kapilasingha's son who prayed  
 To me for thousands of years with greatest devotion.  
 Overwhelmed by it, I blessed him with immortality,  
 I assured him that he will defeat Brahma, Vishnu,  
 Shiva, the Wind, the Moon and the Sun in war.  
 He conquered the three worlds. He made  
 Bajrasingha the king of Padma island and Mahaketu  
 Of Chandra island. He appointed Subahu the ruler  
 Of Kusha island, while he himself ruled Singhala  
 Island. He made Bhaskar the king of Karancha island,  
 Shumbha and Nishumbha kings of Jambu island  
 And Jalataranga the king of Barunapura. Bhumidahana  
 Ruled the netherworld, and Sindhu  
 And Upasindhu remained in charge of the north  
 And the west. Kalanjan became the king of forests,  
 Bajraketu of mountains and Subahu of Nishadapura.  
 O mother! Now Shumbha and Nishumbha have  
 Occupied Amaravati; Biraghanta has become  
 The king of Yashobantipura, Raktabirjya  
 Of Hiranyagarvapura, Bhaskar of the abode of Fire,  
 And Chanda and Munda of my abode. O mother!

The demons have usurped the three worlds.  
 Mahisasura has terrorized all of us. O Mother!  
 You're Brahmayani, Indrayani, Narayani, Matangi,  
 Rudrayani, Tarini, Samayani, Maheswari, Mahamaya,  
 Baseli, Ugratara, Katyayani, Bhabani, Tripura,  
 Bijaya, Ambika, Madhavi, Kankali, Betali, Kalika,  
 Bhairabi, Chandi, Chamundi, Prachanda, Barahi,  
 Bikarali, Kamaseni, Kritanteki, Nagari, Kamakshi,  
 Sadhabi, Pingalakshi, Adityayi, Maruttri,  
 Dakshinai, Uttarayani, Paschimai, Karatai,  
 Chhaya, Maya, Annapurna, Kumari, Bikatai  
 And Ghorarupai! O Mother! You've one thousand  
 Hands; you can also take one thousand forms  
 At will!" So saying, Brahma and the gods bowed  
 To her, which pleased her most.'

Thus says Sarala Das, the poet,  
 Serving at Sri Durga's feet.

x x x

'Listen, Parikshit!  
 Taking pity on the gods, Katyayani told  
 Brahma to ask for any boon he liked to have.  
 Brahma, respectfully, begged her,  
 "On behalf of the thirty-three crore of gods  
 Devoted to you, I pray for Mahisasura's  
 Death." The Goddess assured him, "I'll  
 Make every effort to kill the demon." Saying so,  
 She stretched out her hands. Vishnu gave his conch,  
 Wheel and mace in her hands, Brahma his *kamandalu*,  
*Dambaru*, *pasupata* and *pinaki* bow and Indra  
 His *ajagaba* bow. The gods, who were Aditi's sons,

Gave their earrings as round as the sun and a gem  
 Necklace. Biswadevas gave her a gem that could  
 Dispel the thickest darkness and a sword.  
 The Moon offered *amritasara* and *hemachakra*  
 Snare, the Sky the blue wheel, Yama the death-snare  
 And Kamadeva his five hypnotizing arrows. Bhṛigu  
 Gave her a potful of intoxicating juice,  
 A battleaxe and mace. The Almighty gave her  
*Chakradanda*. The Wind gave her a wheel, ever rotating.  
 Hemavanta presented the *parvata* arrow, and Baruna  
 A snare. Indra gave her *manavedi* arrow, Ganesh  
 The cobra-snare and Karttikeya sweets made of nectar.  
 Indra gave her the *bajrabana*, *nirghantabana*,  
*Amritabana* and *agnisara*. Marudra donated  
*Nidrasara*, *asastamabana* and *akshaya* quiver.  
 Isanya gave her blue *bhujabana*, Shiva a crown  
 Of gems, rosary and ornaments and Ashwini Kumar  
 Medicine. Basuki, Takshaka and all the snakes gave  
 Her the cobra-snare. The planets, too, offered weapons,  
 Such as *madana*, *mardana*, *mohana*, etc. Brihaspati  
 Offered her *Dhanurveda*, *Sisurveda*, *Rigveda*, *Samaveda*,  
*Jajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*. Arundhati  
 Taught her how to cook in *gauri sauri* method.  
 The Sun gave her *baidurya* gem; Baiswanara imparted  
 On her the knowledge of fire and light. Shiva gave  
 Lightning and *amarakosa* bow. Hemavanta  
 Offered her *amlan* clothes to adorn her with  
 And a lion to carry her. *Manapabana danda*  
 Was offered by Narada and a *khechhari* chariot  
 By Ananta. Brahma gave her the swan, his carrier.  
 The pangolin offered her his impenetrable skin.  
 As her carrier, Shiva offered his bull, Vishnu

His Garuda, Indra his Airavata, Kamadeva  
His lion, the Wind his deer, Baiswanara his sheep,  
Yama his buffalo, Karttikeya his peacock, Baruna  
His crocodile, Ganesh his mouse, the Sun his seven  
Horses, the *dikpalas* a lion and Ashwini Kumar his tiger.  
Kubera gave her *ratnabali* and Kamadeva *pannaga*.

O Parikshit! Offering her all their weapons  
And dresses, the gods said, "Mother! We gave you  
All that we had. Bless us so that our devotion  
To you remain intact. Kill Mahisasura and give  
Us back our heavenly abode." Durga replied,  
"I'll surely wipe out the demons". She emerged  
Out of the fire, in her real form.

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## Durga's Stay at Ratnagiri

'Listen, King Parikshit!  
With a look that encompassed the whole creation,  
Maheswari started her journey, riding a lion.  
Her thousand hands with thousand weapons were  
Outspread, her head touching the sky. Scared  
Of her terrible figure, the gods cried out,  
"Save us, Mother!" The hem of her skirt hung over  
Sixty-five *yojanas* of land when she moved along.  
On a mountain to the north-east of a jungle  
Called Uddana, on the banks of Saraswati,  
She alighted and took her seat. At its foot was  
Jenabati city, to its north was a banyan tree  
Called Jata and to the far north was Kulabati city.  
All those places were located near the Labana sea.  
The gods in heaven were watching each of her  
Movements carefully. Hiding her extra hands  
Inside her body and her weapons in the *khechari*  
Chariot, Katyayani stayed seated where she was.  
Close to Singhala island, there were five settlements,



Such as Jenabati, Chandapura, Sambhupura,  
 Birijapura and Chandalapura, girdled by Lakshmibhadra  
 And Saraswati rivers, flowing from the Meru mountain.  
 The whole place measured five hundred *yojanas*  
 And five hundred fingers, in which there was  
 A fruit garden with trees, such as jamun,  
 Coconut, mango, jackfruit, betelnut, banana,  
 Harida, grapes, orange, wood apple, tamarind,  
 Barakoli and amla. Ratnagiri nestled snugly,  
 Surrounded by four mountains, such as  
 Raktasingha, Tundagiri, Simhagiri and Vindhyagiri.'

King Parikshit interrupted, 'O sage! I'm eager  
 To know why the settlement was called  
 Chandalapura.' The sage explained:

'In Satya Yuga, Nahusa was the king  
 Of Sara island where it did not rain for five  
 Years. For the first two years, with the king's  
 Help, the subjects managed themselves somehow.  
 Still there was no rain. The king gave away all  
 The foodgrains he had among the subjects  
 Which lasted for two more years. But seeing  
 No hope for rain, the king held a *yajna* which  
 Failed to please the Rain-god. When the brahmins  
 Sought Basistha's advice, he said, "For disrespecting  
 The gods in the past, we're now subject to calamity."  
 However, he met Brahma and told him,  
 "There had been no rain in Nahusa's kingdom  
 For five years. Because of the benevolence  
 Of the king, the people could manage themselves  
 For four years. O Lord! People and animals are

Dying from hunger every day. Do something to save Their lives." Hearing this, Brahma commanded Narada, "Go and find out where paddy is available. Since you travel across the three worlds, You can easily trace it." Narada left for The earth and, looking for foodgrains, He visited the seven islands. On the banks Of Saraswati, he met a *chandal*, Ambika by name, Who possessed vast acres of land. The *chandal* Informed him, "All the land you see around here Is mine. I've stored heaps of paddy in this twelve-Acre patch. They have been piled on planks of wood With no cover over them. A total of five *mebakshas* Of paddy lie here, exposed to sun, rain and cold." Narada asked, "How long did you take to save So much of paddy?" Ambika answered, "In Satya Yuga, Jalandhar was the king of Singhala island. He had A sweeper who used to collect human faeces And dump them in my backyard. A paddy plant Grew there which yielded three measures of paddy Grains. Next year I sowed them in my land and got Three *nautis*. I lent them to my neighbours on An interest of five *gaunis* for every twenty *gaunis* Of paddy. This way my stock of paddy increased Phenomenally. Once, calamity befell the kingdom Of King Jimutabahana. He borrowed from me One lakh *bharanas* of paddy. At the time of return I told him to pay the usual interest, not a grain More than it. For my benevolence, people praised Me and wished me a long life. Because of their Blessings I outlived Satya Yuga and am still alive."

Narada said, "Listen, Ambika! There has been  
 No rain in Nahusa's kingdom for five years.  
 The subjects are going without food there.  
 You're the only one in the world who can save  
 Their lives." "Yes, I can," the *chandal* said,  
 "But on one condition. I've a daughter.  
 I don't find a suitable groom for her.  
 Whoever marries her would get all the paddy  
 As dowry." Hearing this, Narada shut his ears  
 And went back to Brahma. He informed him,  
 "O the Creator! O Narayana! O Lord  
 Of the world! There lives a *chandal* on the banks  
 Of Saraswati in Singhala island who has  
 A stock of five *mebakshas* of paddy. He can help  
 Nahusa to save his kingdom from calamity."  
 Brahma asked Nahusa to fetch the paddy from  
 The *chandal* and give it away among his subjects.  
 Nahusa reached the *chandal* and asked him  
 For the paddy. Ambika said, "You're a king  
 Of Soma clan. Should you force me to do  
 As you say? It is for you that we live in peace,  
 Conducting the religious activities without  
 Fear." "Who is forcing you to do as I say?"  
 Nahusa asked him. The *chandal* explained,  
 "I have taken an oath to offer my paddy to anyone  
 Who marries my daughter. Now it is up to  
 You to consider." Nahusa left the place  
 And reported to Brahma, "The *chandal*  
 Has enough paddy to feed my subjects for  
 Seven years. He asked me to marry his daughter.  
 Should I defile my clan by marrying a *chandal*?"

Brahma fell silent for a moment. He, then, called Basistha and told him, "Collect the paddy from The *chandal* somehow and give it to Nahusa."

Basistha went to Ambika again, who welcomed The sage respectfully. The sage told him, "You're Righteous. You know, offering food to the hungry Is worth donating seventy-two *medhas* of gold.

If you give away your paddy, you'll live in heaven Forever." The *chandal* replied, "I don't know you.

One who marries my daughter will get it."

Basistha returned to Brahma and told him what The *chandal* had said. Brahma told him, "Marry His daughter and save the creation." Basistha

Went again to the *chandal's* house, accompanied By Markanda, Paulasti, Agasti and many *brahmarsis*.

When he asked Ambika to present his daughter Before them, his joy knew no bounds. He set about Making arrangements for the marriage.

On a Sunday, the first day of the bright

Fortnight of Margasira, the marriage between

Basistha and Arundhati took place. Sage Agasti

Solemnized the marriage, tying the hands

Of the bride and the groom with holy grass. Holding

A conch filled with water and some sesame seeds

Put inside it, Ambika took the vow to give

All his paddy to the son-in-law. Then the grass-knot

Was unfastened and a fire ceremony was held.

After it was over, the groom and the bride had

A sumptuous meal, Basistha returned to heaven

With his wife and Nahusa went back

To his kingdom with the paddy.

Basistha and Arundhati lived together  
 As husband and wife. Under Basistha's spiritual  
 Influence, Arundhati's sin of being a low born  
 Was redeemed. Whatever she cooked tasted nice;  
 The *brahmarsis* and *rajarsis* appreciated it.  
 She helped her husband in religious activities  
 And was soon counted among the women of heaven  
 As the sixty-fourth Annapurna. In course  
 Of time, she gave birth to a son, Shakti who  
 Later became a great sage. Shakti's son was  
 Parasara and Parasara's son was Vyasa.  
 I'm one of the sixty thousand sons of Vyasa.  
 With our spiritual power, we redeemed the sins  
 Of the three worlds. Now I'm telling you about  
 Chandalapura. Those who ate the *chandal's* grains  
 Produced more crops. Happy to see it, King Nahusa,  
 In the *chandal's* honour, named the settlements  
 As Chandalapura.'

Hearing this, Parikshit said,  
 'I'm happy to learn this. You dispelled my doubts.  
 Now I am eager to know more about Sri Durga  
 Who settled herself on Ratnagiri mountain.  
 What did she do next towards the redressal  
 Of the sufferings of the panicked gods?'

Glory to Narayana!  
 Glory to Narakeshwar!  
 You save mankind from hell; you're benevolent.  
 You pervade the whole creation; the universe  
 Is illumined with your radiance. For being  
 Your devotee, Prahlad was tortured by

His father Hiranyakashyapu. You laid  
The wicked demon on your knees and tore him  
Apart. The deluge cannot harm you; your *maya*  
Is unknown even to the gods. How can an ignorant  
Man, as I am, explain your greatness?  
Your body measures ten thousand *yojanas*.  
Your finger-nail is big enough to contain  
All the living beings. You killed Hiranya  
And ordained Prahlad as Indra. You relieved  
The gods of oppression and agony. Seeing  
Your incarnation as Narasimha, the gods  
Were scared. They sent Lakshmi to propitiate  
You. Seeing your beloved, your anger  
Pacified. You changed into a *yogi's* figure  
And looked calm and peaceful. May my mind  
Be focused on Narasimha. May I have  
Salvation with his blessings.

O Noble ones! Worship Narasimha  
And get rid of all health hazards. It'll settle  
Your disputes and make you live longer.  
You'll be blessed with children and nectar  
Will shower on you. You'll have salvation;  
Your sins will be atoned; you'll succeed  
In life and lead a pious life.

May I serve at Narasimha's feet  
All my life, says Sudramuni Sarala Das.

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## Mahisasura Informed of Durga's Arrival

'Listen, O Parikshit!

Seated on the summit of Ratnagiri,  
Durga cast an ominous look on Jenabati,  
That caused disturbances in the city of the demons.  
It was the ninth day of the dark fortnight of Ashwin.  
When Chanda and Munda, the two brothers, had been  
To the forest on hunting. While looking for the prey,  
And when it became midday and they  
Went into the river to have a bath.  
While bathing, their eyes alighted on some golden  
Lotuses floating by. Half-bathed, they went  
In the direction from where they were coming.  
To their surprise, they found a woman sitting  
On the mountain, golden lotuses tumbling down  
From her feet. Presuming that she was no other than  
Goddess Lakshmi, they wondered why Narayana  
Had turned her out of his abode. A woman  
Of matchless beauty, she was sitting there silently,

A veil over her head and eyes downcast.  
Going near her, Chandasura asked, "Where  
Do you come from? Who is your husband?  
Whose daughter are you? You're so young  
And beautiful. What did you do that provoked  
Your husband to forsake you? Are you  
A demoness or a supernatural being or a dweller  
Of the forest? Mahisasura's kingdom, of course,  
Is quite safe, but this forest is teemed with  
Wicked demons and wild animals who might  
Devour you after the sunset. We're in charge  
Of the forest; it is our responsibility to see  
That no untoward incident takes place here.  
What led you to abandon your family? If you  
Agree to be our wife, we'll offer you plenty  
Of wealth and ornaments and love you more  
Than our lives. We'll serve you as faithfully  
As we can and sacrifice everything to make  
You happy. We're the commanders of Mahisasura  
Who is the monarch of the three worlds."  
When they stopped, Maheswari, with a smile  
On her lips, gave them a sidelong look that bowled  
Them over. They stood agape, putting a finger  
On their mouths. She told them softly, "O demons!  
Here are the answers to your queries.  
My mother is Fire and my father Anakara.  
As the daughter of Fire, I'm of Nirakara's clan.  
My husband's name is God, the Almighty.  
I'm ill-mannered and intolerant. I'm not loyal  
To my husband as I'm not cut out for conjugal  
Relationship. In the very first night, I refused  
To sleep with him. In anger, he turned me



Out of the house. For my deviant behaviour,  
I failed to lead a family life and was forced  
To come here for a shelter. When I've given up  
The hope of my life, should I fear the wicked demons?"  
Her words caused a panic in the demons; they  
Drew aside, realizing that it was impossible  
To get her. Collecting himself, Chandasura asked  
Her, "Do you agree to be Mahisasura's queen?  
If you do, we'll inform our king about it."  
Durga replied, "Tell him that I've come here  
Only for him." Hearing this, they shut their ears,  
And told her apologetically, "You're our Goddess.  
We feel sorry for all that we told you at the start.  
We beg pardon of you." So saying, they left.

Chanting "Shiva!" Chanda and Munda  
Proceeded to Mahisasura at a speed  
Faster than the wind. By the time they reached  
The destination, Mahisasura had already  
Adorned the throne after his meal. Seeing them,  
Mahisasura asked what brought them there.  
To which they said, "O Lord! You're omnipotent.  
Today we went to the forest to hunt. While  
Bathing in the river, we saw golden lotuses float by.  
In our attempt to find out where they were coming  
From, we reached a woman sitting on the summit  
Of Ratnagiri. Her dense, curly hair had the beauty  
Of a cloud; her forehead shone like molten gold;  
Her beautiful roving eyes and her sidelong look  
Could rock a mountain; her nose, as bright as gold,  
Could enchant an onlooker and her drooping  
Earrings glinted in the light of the sun. O Lord!

Her feet were like lotus-leaf, as red as ruby;  
Her lips like *jaba* flowers; teeth like diamond  
That shone like the moon; her voice like that of cuckoo  
In Spring; her words could hypnotize sages;  
Her throat more beautiful than *kunda* flowers;  
Her dangling arms like stems of water lily;  
Her chest as life-giving as that of Suravi;  
The sight of her breast, like Rahu swallowing  
The moon, swallows the race of men and when  
Clothes are removed from it, they look like the sun  
And the moon. O Lord! The dark forest was lighted  
By her radiance. Her slender waist supported  
Her wide chest. She can change the seasons  
By the power of touch. When she takes someone  
Into her arms, summer feels colder than  
The sandalwood paste. Her embrace changes  
The rainy season into summer. O Lord!  
The touch of her breasts fills her paramour with  
The nectar of the autumn dew. The touch of her arms  
Makes one feel warm in winter. The one whom  
She takes into her lap feels the mirth of spring  
In him. Her breasts and hips are full and her  
Deep navel is captivating. The stem of a lotus  
Plant cannot pass between her breasts; it seems  
Kamadeva would concede defeat to her in war.  
O Lord! Between her breasts runs a line  
Of dark hair, looking like a blue line between  
Rows of gems. Her thighs are like inverted  
Banana trees. Her gait is as attractive as that  
Of a swan. The soles of her feet look like  
The *ashoka* flowers, the toes like *champak* buds  
And toenails like the *tarata* flowers. When

She moves, lotuses bloom at every step. Her face  
 Looks like the rising moon. The moon on the full  
 Moon day will fall short of comparison as  
 It has stains on it. She has doe-like eyes,  
 Sweet smiles; she is calm and generous.  
 She comes of a noble family; she is righteous  
 And well versed in scriptures. It is a delight  
 To see her; she is smart and capable.  
 She is a Vaishnavi, virtuous and noble.  
 She is hundred times more beautiful than  
 Rambha. O Lord! Prajapati, putting aside  
 His duties, invested all his time and energy in  
 Making her. Her chest is lovely, breasts lovelier.  
 O Lord! She earnestly desires to have you.  
 She asked us to send you to her. You're of a noble  
 Family, so is she. It seems both of you are  
 Made for each other."

O Parikshit! Hearing her being so praised  
 By Chanda and Munda, Mahisasura was drowned  
 In the sea of lust. Kapilasingha's son left the throne  
 And held them in deep embrace. He took off his gem  
 Necklaces and put them around their necks. He told  
 Them, "You're truly my friends. I implore you  
 To fetch her. Why didn't one of you stay with  
 Her? In your absence, someone, seduced by her  
 Beauty, might take her away! O Friends!  
 I feel like dying for her! Fetch the gem of that  
 Woman to me." He asked them to leave with  
 A golden palanquin, studded with diamond  
 And elaborately decorated, one lakh chariots,  
 Five lakh horses, three lakh foot soldiers, a group  
 Of musicians and plenty of jewellery for her.

There was celebration all over the kingdom,  
With golden flags atop houses, spraying of sandalwood  
Paste on the roads, women waiting with plates with  
Flowers and lamps, burning of camphor dust  
And sprinkling water mixed with camphor and musk  
At every doorstep, canopies hung with clusters  
Of gems and pearls and all temples decorated.

Chanda and Munda, with the troops,  
Marched on through the forest until they reached  
Ratnagiri. The air was cool and sweet-smelling.  
They found her sitting where she was, her radiance  
Illumining one thousand *yojanas*. Placing the jewellery  
Before her, they said respectfully, "We did as you  
Said. Hearing about you, the king's joy knew no  
Bounds. He has sent these jewellery for you.  
O mother! The glory of a woman lies in having  
A husband in her youth, and you're going to achieve  
It. The king has agreed to make you his wife. Now  
Put on these ornaments and adorn the palanquin.  
Let's proceed to the king. Good times have come  
In your life. Be merciful to us, O Bhabani!"  
Durga replied, "How can I marry someone whom  
I haven't seen even for once? How can I believe  
You? You've to take some more pains to go back  
To your king and tell him to come to me. I will  
Like to go with him. But how can it happen  
Unless we see each other? We need to know  
Each other before taking a decision. You're  
Telling me lies, considering that I'm  
A woman and can easily be duped. Now  
Go back and persuade your king to meet me."

---

## The Killing of Chanda and Munda

‘Listen, O Parikshit!

Chanda and Munda returned to Mahisasura

As quickly as they could. Seeing them,

Mahisasura, felt immense joy.

They informed him, “O King of kings!

That Vaishnavi refused to believe a word

Of what we said. She asks you to visit her.

If she finds you deserving, she’ll accompany

You to your palace in a ceremonial procession.”

Mahisasura flared up, “She can never be

A pious woman. A woman, so curious to know

About a man other than her husband, must be

A real flirt. Panic sweeps the three worlds

When I move out. How does a common woman,

Such as she is, dare test my merit? O Chanda

And Munda! Rush to her immediately. If

She agrees to come with you, it’s so far so good.

If not, bring her here forcibly.”

Chanda and Munda departed post-haste,  
Brandishing their weapons. The sky resonated  
With their war cry; the earth rocked under  
The weight of their feet. Reaching Ratnagiri,  
They told her, "O Mahatmani! Your message  
Infuriated the king, who ordered us to fetch  
You forthwith. If you don't obey his order,  
We'll take you forcibly, pulling you by the hair."  
Durga replied, "I abide by a code of ethics.  
As great kshatriyas, you should understand it.  
Who to complain if the sea crosses the shore?  
What will the subjects do if the king becomes  
Unfair to them? How can one help if the cloud  
Refuses to rain or the trees do not produce  
Fruits or men behave with women?" Biting  
Their lips in anger, the demons said, "We don't  
Know what you mean by ethics. But, to us,  
It means devouring the sages, men and hermits  
And drinking wine. We don't know  
Where you came from; now you will be  
Finished off for your own ego." Durga  
Warned them, "You stupid demons! You'll dig  
Your own grave if you violate the laws  
Of God. Don't underestimate me. I'm  
The slayer of demons." Infuriated  
By her hurtful words, they swore loudly  
And stretched their hands to catch her.  
Letting out a roar of rage, she gave them  
An angry stare that sent them sprawling  
Onto the ground with a loud noise.  
Next she produced Chhaya and Maya  
Out of her, who had a single body that

Pervaded the three worlds. Her lips touched  
The sky and her tongue the netherworld.  
She was Kalaratri; she had eight hands with  
Weapons in them. Durga commanded her,  
“Hurry up! Enjoy yourself feasting on  
The flesh of the demons.”

Like a hawk, she swooped on the demons  
That caught them unawares. Frightened  
By her gigantic figure, they took to their heels.  
She went on striking them with the cutlass that  
Left many of them dead. Excited by the sight  
Of blood, Kalaratri ate a bellyful of their flesh  
And drank their blood to her heart's content.  
She did not even spare the elephants, horses  
And the workers who had accompanied the troops.  
She turned around and rained down arrows  
On the demons. Her mouth hanging open,  
She swallowed many of them. Unable to counter  
The attack, the demons scattered away like birds  
Without a nest. She stretched her hands  
For many *yojanas* and picked each of them.  
Not a soul had survived to pass on the news  
To their king.

O Parikshit! At the palace, Mahisasura  
Was waiting for Chanda and Munda to return,  
Not knowing that they had been gulped by  
Kalaratri.’

Glory to Katyayani, Foe to the demons,  
Whose abode is Ratnagiri.

Glory to goddesses Chhaya and Maya,  
Destroyers of Chanda and Munda!  
Sudramuni Sarala Das seeks refuge  
At their feet.



---

## The Killing of Shumbha and Nishumbha

Shuka told King Parikshit:  
‘You heard about Sri Durga’s astonishing  
Feat. This is one of the examples  
Of her countless heroic exploits, which  
No one can express in words.  
King Mahisasura’s only thought now was  
How to get the woman whom Chanda  
And Munda had mentioned. His intense desire  
For her love made him restless. A mood  
Of melancholy descended on him. When he thought  
Of her, he felt a touch of Spring air in him.  
The day passed, so did the night. As soon as  
It became morning, he hurried to meet  
Shumbha and Nishumbha.

Looking sick and broken down,  
He could not utter a word. Sorry to see  
His condition, Shumbha and Nishumbha took

Him in their arms and asked him the cause  
 Of his grief. Mahisasura stated, "Look!  
 Chanda and Munda told me about a woman  
 They had met on Ratnagiri. She was as beautiful  
 As she was virtuous. On my orders they went  
 To Ratnagiri to fetch her. The day passed, so did  
 The night, but they didn't return. I'm afraid  
 They might have been killed by her. I was too  
 Worried to have a wink of sleep last night."  
 Shumbha and Nishumbha told him, "O King!  
 Have you lost your mind? Those inclined to  
 Others' wives, suffer most. You're the Lord  
 Of the universe, God of gods. What makes you  
 Think a mere woman has killed them? Please  
 Retire to your palace and have some rest.  
 We're going there to find out the truth." Sending  
 Him away, they left for Ratnagiri, accompanied  
 By their army. Looking as huge as the Mandara  
 Mountain, they proceeded with unwieldy maces  
 In their hands. They wondered: Where did  
 The woman come from? Surely, the king's days  
 Are numbered, otherwise, why would he send  
 Us to look for the woman? How disgraceful  
 It is for warriors, such as we are, who have  
 Conquered the three worlds! Have the demons  
 Fallen from grace?

Jenabati city was one hundred eight  
*Yojanas* from Ratnagiri. Now as Durga's eyes  
 Fell on Jenabati, the porch of the palace near  
 The Lion Gates crumbled into dust. A small  
 Fire started in the kitchen and spread everywhere,

Burning down Mahisasura's palace.  
With no clouds in the sky, it rained heavily,  
Damaging houses and villages severely.  
A vulture, sitting on the throne went on eating  
The flesh of the dead, turning its face northwards.  
From the roof of the queen's abode, the hooting  
Of an owl was heard. Meteors rained down on  
The city, and the yelping of the jackals was deafening,  
Things were missing from where they were.

While passing through the forest, Shumbha  
And Nishumbha could not trace Chanda  
And Munda and their soldiers. Katyayani had left  
No clue; she had swallowed them completely  
And had drunk every drop of their blood.  
The song of cuckoos and the pleasant forest air  
Delighted them. Reaching Ratnagiri, they saw Durga  
Sitting on it. Stunned by her beauty, they were surprised  
To see her all alone. Without fear and shame, they  
Quickly got onto the mountain. She was well dressed  
And adorned with precious ornaments. Disguising  
Themselves as her admirers, they stood before her.  
The slayer of demons did neither raise her face  
To look at them, nor did she speak a word.  
Shumbha and Nishumbha asked her, "O Goddess!  
Where do you come from?" She replied,  
"I was born in the Meru mountain. I didn't have  
The luck to have a family of my own. Abandoned  
By my husband and turned out of his house, I've  
Come here. I chose this place so that the beasts  
And demons could easily see me and eat me up.  
Intolerant by nature, I couldn't cope with anyone  
In my life." The demons asked, "Chanda and Munda

Had come to you with the king's message. Why did you  
 Deceive a great king such as Mahisasura?" Durga  
 Replied, "There can be no sin greater than falsehood.  
 With respect to the divine law, the sea doesn't cross  
 Its shore. Had Mahisasura really loved me, he would  
 Have come to me in person. Isn't it embarrassing  
 On my part to visit someone I don't know and tell  
 Him about my virtues in the presence of others?  
 I don't know the names of those you just mentioned.  
 They were discourteous and shameless people.  
 While they came forward to take me forcibly,  
 As if by a miracle, their heads fell off their  
 Bodies. God punishes those who do not follow  
 The ways of truth. You seem to be kind, learned  
 And benevolent. I'm happy to see you and hear  
 Your words. Now let me know your whereabouts."  
 They said, "O Maheswari! You're the jewel among  
 Women. Our scriptures say a virtuous woman,  
 A benevolent God, a noble man and a pious  
 Brahmin are spiritually superior to others.  
 We are the sons of King Mahidas and the grandsons  
 Of Tadakasuara. We're mightier than Indra, but  
 Scared of Vishnu in all our births. We started  
 Meditating on Brahma at the place where river  
 Ganga meets the ocean, living on only air.  
 It continued for nine thousand years during  
 Which our bodies melted away many times,  
 And formed again, our nails, faces, noses and legs  
 Growing anew.

At the end of nine lakh years of unflinching  
 Devotion, Brahma appeared, seated on a swan.  
 He wished to offer a boon to us. We begged him,

‘Grant us the boon that no man will ever kill us. We know how Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, Destroyed the demons.’ Brahma cautioned us, ‘Vishnu is a trickster; he can take the form of a man As well as a woman. Demon Bailochana was not Killed by any man. To kill him, Vishnu was born To him as his daughter, Malati. Therefore, I bless You that no man or woman can kill you.’”

Durga, feigning innocence, told them, “That You’ll live for a long long time, I fear, you’ll have Many wives besides me.” Shumbha and Nishumbha Replied, “Listen! We asked Brahma to tell us the secret Of our death. Don’t let it on to anyone. We disclose It to you as we love each other. He said we would Die when we put our hands on each other’s head. We’re the rulers of Singhala island. We’ve conquered Heaven. It’s on our might that Mahisasura has Become the monarch of the three worlds. We defeated Baruna and robbed Kubera of all the wealth. Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar can never be our Equals. If you really love us, come with us to our Kingdom.” Durga told them, “I’m touched by Your sweet words. I was looking for Mahisasura, But after meeting you, I forgot all about him. I’ve abandoned my relatives. I’ve decided to be Your wife. I’ve no desire for wealth and riches, But I’ve terrible weakness for dance and music.” Delighted, Shumbha and Nishumbha told her, “We’re skilled in all forms of dance and music. We’ll perform the *tandava* dance to please you.”

Overwhelmed by emotion, they danced  
 As best as they could, Durga clapping and cheering  
 Them from time to time. She was saying, "It's my  
 Good luck that I met you and enjoyed your dance.  
 You're the Lord of my life. I've sacrificed everything  
 For you. I'm greatly impressed by your performance;  
 Now put your hands on each other's head."  
 With the passion of lust inflaming in them,  
 They forgot the note of caution Brahma had  
 Sounded out. Carried away by her sweet words,  
 They did as she said, oblivious of their ensuing  
 Death. Those whom no one in the three worlds could  
 Slay, were now lying lifeless, because of their lust.  
 Seeing Shumbha and Nishumbha dead, thirty-three  
 Crores of gods arrived there, leaving their heavenly  
 Abode. Happy and relieved, they said in chorus,  
 "You've relieved us of our agony. You're  
 The Saviour of the three worlds."  
 The most powerful commanders of Mahisasura,  
 Such as Chanda, Munda, Shumbha and Nishumbha  
 Were killed by misusing Brahma's boon. People  
 Rejoiced at the news of their death.'

O Noble Ones! Think on Durga.  
 May she remove all your impediments.  
 Take refuge at her feet. May your devotion  
 To her reflect in your thought, speech and action.  
 With her one thousand hands and one thousand  
 Weapons, she will destroy the wicked and protect  
 The righteous. Chanting her name saves you  
 From the fear of death, removes all your

Obstacles, protects you from misfortune, removes  
Your sorrows, saves you from fatal diseases,  
Instils wisdom in you, grants you a long life,  
Bestows on you Lakshmi's blessings, blesses  
You with children if you have none and  
Saves you from danger. She fulfils the wishes  
Of sages and wise men who meditate on her.  
You can please her by listening to her story  
Or by chanting her name.

I'm narrating to you the *Vishnu Purana*  
Which is the essence of *Sri Bhagavata*.  
I bow to her day and night, says Sarala Das,  
Praying for the well-being of mankind.

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## The Killing of Chamara and Bemala

Shuka said, 'O King!  
You're listening to the story of Durga's heroic  
Exploits, how she outwitted the demons,  
The conquerors of the three worlds  
That ultimately brought about their death.  
O the Wise! Know that seducing others' wives shortens  
One's lifetime.' Brimming with hope, King Parikshit  
Said, 'May I be liberated from my earthly life by  
Listening to her story. Tell me, how King Mahisasura  
Responded to the news of his commanders' death.'  
Shuka replied:

'Waiting anxiously for Shumbha and Nishumbha  
To return with the woman, Mahisasura was painting  
A rosy picture of his union with her. Sitting  
On a coral platform outside the door, he was  
Spying on the street restlessly, when Kala  
And Bikala reached him on their return from



Vindhyagiri. They told him, "O Lord! For your  
 Greed for a woman, you've gambled away  
 Most of your valuable assets. First, Chanda  
 And Munda went to her with their soldiers,  
 All of whom were brutally slain. Next you  
 Sent Shumbha and Nishumbha who, lured by  
 Her into singing and dancing, laid down their  
 Lives." Shocked at the news, Mahisasura cried out,  
 "No, I don't believe it. How can anyone kill  
 Them whom the gods daren't challenge?"  
 Kala and Bikala explained, "O Lord! That woman  
 Is a she-devil; she has eliminated all your  
 Men by fraud and guile." Plunged into despair,  
 Mahisasura sent for Chamara and Bemala.  
 When they came, he commanded them, "Leave  
 With one thousand soldiers forthwith, collect  
 Information about Chanda, Munda, Shumbha  
 And Nishumbha and collect the details of  
 That woman, her character and conduct.  
 Have you ever heard of such a woman in your  
 Life? I've been here since Satya Yuga, but  
 Never did I come across a witch of a woman  
 As she is!" He ordained them as his commanders  
 And instructed them, "Fetch her by pulling her  
 Hair." Without delay, Chamara and Bemala,  
 Accompanied by one thousand warriors,  
 Marched on. Reaching the Uddan forest, they  
 Surrounded Ratnagiri, on the summit of which,  
 Durga was seen sitting, her head bent down.  
 They went to her and asked, "Where do you  
 Come from? Chanda, Munda, Shumbha  
 And Nishumbha came to you; they never

Returned." Durga told them, "This is the way  
Of the world. Here, no one lives forever. All  
Pass away, leaving their virtues and vices  
Behind. They returned to where they had come  
From. Human life is like a bubble; it stays  
For a while and then disappears. Is there  
Anyone immortal in this world? No one knows  
Whether you'll die today or tomorrow. You're  
Aware of Brahma's boon to Mahisasura.  
But that Brahma is also subject to death."  
Chamara and Bemala warned her, "Stop your  
Rhetoric! Do you agree to marry Mahisasura  
Or not? If you do, we'll take you to him with  
Greatest care and respect. If you don't,  
We offer our willingness to marry you."  
She said, "I've been wishing to marry him since  
Long. I won't marry anyone other than him.  
Listen, I've two daughters who are as beautiful  
As they are virtuous. I would like to offer them  
To you." She called out to her daughters, Chhaya  
And Maya, sounding out to them that she had  
Arranged suitable grooms for them. The girls  
Came out, seductively dressed and with a crowd  
Of ornaments on them, their buns decorated  
With flowers of many colours. Bewitched by  
Their beauty, the demons thought they could  
Entice the whole world even without ornaments.  
Introducing them to Chamara and Bemala,  
She said, "These are my daughters, Chhaya  
And Maya. I leave them in your care." The joy  
Of the demons knew no bounds, they left  
The place with their brides.

They took them to Namagiri, a hill  
On the banks of Lakshmibhadra, where their  
Troops had been stationed. They spent the day  
In merriment, in drinking, having a lot of fun  
And cracking jokes. When it became night  
And the warriors fell asleep, the demons wished  
To make love to them. They were heavily drunk,  
And their minds had gone blank. Taking  
Advantage of it, Chhaya and Maya mounted  
On them, and pretending to have sex with them,  
Tore their chests apart. With a roar of rage,  
They launched a sudden attack on the warriors  
And killed all of them, except Kala and Bikala,  
Who were wise enough to duck into a cave.'

---

The Killing of Kantimala,  
Raktabirjya, Biraghanta,  
Kaladanda and Bidulaksha

‘Returning to Jenabati city, Kala and Bikala  
Told Mahisasura about all that happened  
The night before:

“As instructed by you, Chamara and Bemala  
Met the young woman on the summit of Ratnagiri.  
Captivated by her beauty they begged her for  
Her love, to which she replied, ‘Hearing about  
Mahisasura’s great achievements, I decided  
To marry him. The king’s wife is like your mother.  
How dare you treat her otherwise!’ O Lord!  
She offered her two daughters to them who killed  
Them at night on the Namagiri hill fraudulently.  
In the morning, we found them lying dead, their  
Faces upwards and their hearts torn apart.  
The warriors who had accompanied them were also

Killed. Shumbha and Nishumbha had made  
The same mistake and had to pay the price.”

Hearing this, Mahisasura broke down in  
Grief. A sense of guilt seized him.  
He mumbled, “My dear ones! I sent you to do  
My work, it’s for me you laid down your lives.  
I’ve become the monarch of the three worlds  
Because of your sacrifice. Now that you’re  
Gone, it bears heavily on me.” Saying so, he rolled  
On the ground in bitter agony, and a while  
Later, he got up, hissing like a snake.  
Being informed, the rest of his commanders,  
Such as Raktabirjya, Biraghanta, Kantimala  
And Bidulaksha assembled there. Looking  
At them, Mahisasura said, “You’re the only  
Ones I’m left with. I command you to go  
To Ratnagiri at once and bring that stupid  
Woman, pulling her by the hair. She has killed all  
My men by deceitful means. See that you carry  
Her in the air, not letting her feet  
Touch the ground. I’ll mince her flesh,  
Cook it with her blood and eat it.” Raktabirjya  
Told him, “What you say is right. It makes  
My hackles rise. O Lord! The four of us  
Are your most loved ones. When we punish  
Someone, we don’t discriminate  
Between a demon and a god. The earth cracks  
When we walk, and the gods shake in fear.  
Do we care that wicked woman who is an  
Outsider? But there is a problem. If we kill  
A woman, it will be a sin. If we don’t,

It'll be like submitting ourselves to her.  
 Now, tell us what to do." Kala and Bikala  
 Interrupted, "Don't take her so lightly because  
 She is a woman. She is the one who killed Chanda  
 And Munda mercilessly; she is instrumental  
 For the death of Shumbha and Nishumbha.  
 She slew Chamara and Bemala in the same way  
 As Narasimha did to Hiranya. Do you still  
 Say she is a mere woman? She is an enchantress,  
 Skilled in warfare. So, be careful and take with  
 You as many warriors as you can."  
 Kantimala roared out, "Whoever she may be,  
 Who cares? I'll bring her here presently." So  
 Saying, he jolted out of his seat, brandishing  
 His iron mace. Seeing his fury, Raktabirjya,  
 Biraghanta and Bidulaksha got themselves  
 Ready to go. With a large army, they set out  
 For Ratnagiri. The earth seemed to give way;  
 The gods in heaven including Brahma were  
 Scared. Reaching their destination  
 Towards the end of the night, they surrounded  
 Ratnagiri and raised a war cry that deafened  
 The three worlds, while the Goddess was watching  
 Their activities from the summit of the mountain.  
 They challenged her, "Where would you hide now?  
 We'll finish you off now and here."

Filled with inexplicable anger,  
 She wiped the sweat that was pouring off  
 Her forehead. From the sweat that dropped  
 Onto the ground, Narayani was born.  
 She was blue-complexioned, her face as white

As a lotus. She had conch, wheel, mace and lotus  
 In her four hands. Adorned with crown,  
 Earrings and necklaces, she looked radiant  
 And seemed to be in the world of her own.  
 Durga let out a roar of rage, from which  
 Baseli was born. One of her legs was on the earth,  
 The other one touching the sky. She wore her hair  
 Loose. She was of red complexion with  
 A lusty look. She had a *konta* in her right hand  
 And a silver cutlass in her left. Durga, then,  
 Gave an angry stare at the demons, from which  
 Bhairabi appeared. She had one leg and four  
 Hands; straggly hair, and she carried weapons,  
 Such as trident, *dambaru*, *khatwang* and bow.  
 She was white in complexion; her body glittered  
 Like coral. Durga breathed out noisily;  
 Brahmayani was born from her nose. She was  
 Of *kumkum*-complexion, with eight hands,  
 Four heads and two legs. She had the *ajagaba*  
 Bow, sword, cutlass and rosary in her hands.  
 Next, Durga raised her hands and gave a loud  
 Cry. Indrayani appeared from the tip of her sword.  
 She was adorned with a crown of gems on  
 Her head and *baijayanti* necklace around  
 Her neck. She carried thunder and the *ardrabali*  
 Bow as her weapons. She was as fast-moving  
 As Uccaihsraba. She had one leg, two  
 Heads and one thousand hands. She was as  
 Radiant as fire. Durga let out a wild cry,  
 From which Dakeswari was born. Maheswari  
 Was born from Durga's navel, who had five  
 Faces, three eyes on her forehead, two legs

And ten hands, a bright gem hung from her  
 Neck. She was as white as *kunda* and camphor.  
 She was armed with the *pinaka* bow, arrow,  
 Parshurama's axe, sword, *phala*, shield,  
 Thunder, mace, the *kodanda* and trident.  
 From Durga's navel, Chandrakanta was also  
 Born, looking terrible. Jogeswari was born from  
 Her throat, Kamala from her cheeks, Tripuramohini  
 From her eyes, Katyayani from her cheeks  
 And Bhadrakali from her arms. Bikarali  
 Was born from her belly, armed with a spade  
 And a snare. She was of dark complexion,  
 Squint-eyed, curved body and a wagging  
 Tongue, sticking out. Her forehead was  
 Daubed with vermilion; she was gigantic in size,  
 Her head touching the sky. From Durga's arms  
 Chandika was born. She had three heads,  
 Three hands and three legs, Ugratara  
 From her navel. From the soil scratched  
 By her feet Tarini was born. She had one leg,  
 Four heads, four hands and a slender waist with  
 A lion as her carrier.

O Parikshit! Sixty-four *yoginis* were born from  
 Durga's body, each more radiant than the other.  
 Durga herself was born on a Tuesday, the eighth  
 Day of the bright fortnight of Ashwin. She took  
 Many forms to wipe out the demons.  
 Glory to Maheswari who descended on the earth  
 With *yoginis*. Glory to Katyayani who is always  
 Drunk and busy slaying the demons. O Goddess!  
 You liberate mankind from the bondage of space



And time. You're a comet to the demons  
 And protector of the righteous. Your ways are  
 Inscrutable, unknown to the gods.  
 Glory to the sixty-four *yoginis* whom  
 I pray day and night. O Bikarali! O Kankali!  
 O Betali! You're skinny with a garland  
 Of heads around your neck. You're armed with  
 Sword and cutlass. Your body is smeared with  
 Blood. You're Ramachandi. You're Brahmayani,  
 Seated on Garuda. You're Indrayani riding  
 A cobra, you're Rudrayani moving on a bull,  
 Bhairabi riding a vulture, Bhadrakali  
 Seated on a tiger, Ugratara on an ox,  
 Mahamaya on a lion, Biraja on a tiger,  
 Chamunda on a bear, Kankali on a peacock,  
 Samarasti on a camel, Matangi on a donkey,  
 Mahamaya on a deer, Barahi on a dog, Bikarali  
 On a cloud, Behati on a sheep, Chandrakanti  
 On a goat, Kamakshi on a monkey, Tarakshi  
 On a bahutia, Betali on a cat, Chanchala on  
 A buffalo and Katayani on an elk.  
 You sing and dance wildly. You're  
 As calm as you're angry. You're  
 As innocent as you're ferocious.  
 O Parikshit! This is the story  
 Of the sixty-four *yoginis*.'

Sudramuni Sarala Das says:

O Noble ones! I'm unlearned and impious.  
 I've been a farmer from an early age. I'm ignorant  
 Of scriptures. My wisdom falls short  
 Of gratifying the curiosity of the wise men.

The *Vishnu Purana* is as unfathomable as  
 An ocean. Vishnu's mercy is as uncountable  
 As the sands of the shore. Narmada Saraswati,  
 Krupajal's daughter, is worshipped  
 As Sarala Chandi in Kali Yuga.  
 She is Goddess Hingula. She is also Mangala  
 As she is the liberator of the souls of mankind.  
 Oh! How can I measure the depth of the ocean,  
 Being ignorant of the ways of devotion  
 And the rules of worship? It's my fortune  
 To have a glimpse of the Goddess who tells me  
 What to write. O Learned ones! Forgive me for  
 My mistakes. Listening to Hari's story is as virtuous  
 As offering horse-sacrifice to God. For the well-being  
 Of mankind I'm narrating the *Chandi Purana*.  
 I'm poet Sarala Das, the devotee of Sarala Chandi  
 Of Jankherpur. One who listens to the *purana*  
 Will be saved from misfortune. O Learned ones!  
 I told you the story of the sixty-four *yoginis*;  
 By listening to it, you'll be blessed with  
 A long life, wealth, children and salvation.

x x x

Shuka continued, 'Listen, Parikshit,  
 To the names of the sixty-four *yoginis*.  
 They are as follows:

Chhaya, Maya, Narayani, Brahmayani,  
 Rudrayani, Bhairabi, Indrayani, Maheswari,  
 Baseli, Ugratara, Tarini, Chachika, Ambika,  
 Khechari, Bhagabati, Bilasuni, Kamala, Shanti,  
 Katyayani, Madhabi, Chamunda, Anandi,

Mahanandi, Sarupa, Barahi, Ferunda, Nagari,  
 Keshari, Bhuchari, Karali, Betali, Bhadrakali,  
 Kankali, Kalika, Pitasuni, Bhalunki, Kankamukhi,  
 Sampadi, Samudi, Mekhali, Anuchhaya,  
 Mahabali, Gopali, Mohini, Kamaseni,  
 Kamarupi, Kamakshi, Chandi, Chaturayani,  
 Kubhadrayani, Kapali, Rudra, Shyama, Gauri,  
 Bhadrakshi, Dakeswari, Nimanjai, Urdhanetra,  
 Bimala, Nirmali, Pingalaswari, Siddhangi,  
 Poelani and Sureswari.

Fond of living on the bones, skin and flesh  
 Of men and animals, their eyes fell on  
 The gathering of a huge number of demons.  
 Their tongues, outstretched, wagged violently  
 At the sight of food in front of them. Faint  
 With hunger, they appealed to Durga,  
 “You gave birth to all of us, but how  
 Can we survive if you don’t give us food?”

Pointing at the demon soldiers, Durga told  
 Them, “Go and eat these demons. Share it among  
 Yourselves. Let there be no leftover; consume  
 Their bones, skin, flesh – everything. Don’t  
 Complain that it was not enough. You will  
 Have much more very shortly.” With great  
 Joy, the starving *yoginis* swooped on the demons  
 Like a hawk. They swallowed whoever came  
 Their way, including elephants and horses.  
 Each chose her own prey and ate him up.  
 The demons retaliated with all their strength,  
 Using *konta*, mace and arrows. But the *yoginis*

Dodged every attack by making themselves  
 Invisible. Their sudden disappearance  
 And reappearance confused the demons; in fury,  
 They poured down the arrows like the rain  
 In Shravana. The *yoginis* gulped down the arrows  
 Effortlessly. Behaving as enchantresses,  
 They duped the demons into being killed.  
 During the course of the battle, Bidulaksha  
 And Bhagabati confronted each other. Bewitched  
 By her beauty, Bidulaksha threw away  
 His weapons and begged her, "O moon-faced one!  
 I'm drowned in the sea of your beauty. Save me."  
 Bhagabati tricked him into going with her  
 To the arbour, shaded by *madhabi* creepers, on  
 The banks of Lakshmibhadra. They walked along  
 Like man and wife, hand in hand. Reaching  
 There, they sat together and had a lot of fun  
 That excited Bidulaksha's lustful desire.  
 She took him into her lap, kissed him on his cheeks,  
 And while drawing him closer to her heart,  
 Bit his head into two halves. Another bite  
 At his chest tore his body into shreds.  
 The earth heaved a sigh of relief. A great  
 Rejoice went up in heaven. His fellow commanders  
 Kantimala, Raktabirjya and Biraghanta  
 Could not get wind of it.

After killing Bidulaksha, she went back  
 To the demons. To her delight, she found  
 The *yogini* sisters busy destroying the enemy.  
 Kaladanda, the king of the netherworld,  
 Was battling with Baseli, firing five

Arrows at a time at her, which Baseli crushed  
With her five fingers. Then, he shot  
Eighteen arrows, which broke into pieces  
As soon as they hit her. Next, he sent  
Sixty-four arrows, all of which she caught with  
Her left hand. Then, he fired one hundred  
Twenty arrows, and then, one thousand arrows  
At her. The twangs of the bowstring deafened  
The world. Baseli let out a roar, so  
Terrible that Kaladanda's bow, quiver,  
Mace and sword were burnt down.  
Completely disarmed, he landed a blow  
On her chest; the sky resonated with the sound it  
Produced. The hand that could crush a mountain  
To dust, began to bleed. In return, Baseli knocked  
Him out with a severe blow on his chest. She,  
Then, struck him with a sword that broke  
Into pieces. Next, she hit him with her  
Cutlass, which, too, fell into pieces. Then, she  
Wrestled with him, tore his heart apart, but,  
Still he did not succumb to the injury.  
She wrung his neck, but it was of no avail.  
When all her attempts failed, she realized that  
He was invincible. Exhausted, she fell silent.  
Just then, she heard Yama's voice coming  
Through the air: "O mother! He is out of  
The clutches of death; so he is named Kaladanda.  
Fire cannot burn him. But if you leave him  
As such, he'll continue to trouble us."

Realizing the agony of the gods, she  
Pounced on his chest and made him her

Carrier. Riding on him, she entered the battlefield.  
Finding Kaladanda vanquished, Yama prayed  
To her with greatest respect.'

Glory to Abhaya, who rides a lion,  
Red in complexion, whose face is daubed with  
Blood, who has long teeth, a curved mouth  
And penetrating eyes, whose tongue is  
Outstretched and wagging, who has a garland  
Of heads around her neck and one of whose  
Feet is on the earth and the other in the sky.  
O blood-faced Goddess, clad in red silk,  
Whose mouth can swallow the three worlds,  
Whose beauty can overpower Kamadeva!  
You're firm; you're Aparna, a foe  
To the wicked. You've large lips, as red as  
The *bimba* fruit, a narrow forehead  
And a garland of hibiscus flowers  
Around your neck. You don't discriminate  
Between your devotees, whether he is  
A brahmin or a *chandal*. You live on  
The flesh of buffalo, sheep, goat and boar.  
You bathe in blood. You look terrible  
With cruel eyes and a skinny body.  
Your glory is immense, says  
Sudramuni Sarala Das benignly.

'O Parikshit! Those who hear  
The story of Kaladanda's death are not  
Summoned to Yama's abode. Scared of him,  
Yama had to flee his abode; so did Kala  
And Bikala. In Satya Yuga, during his reign

Of fifteen thousand years, Yama dared not  
Visit his kingdom. Now that he is gone,  
Yama was greatly relieved.'

O Mother! The Saviour of the gods!  
Accept my prayer. Those who listen to the story  
Of Kaladanda's death are liberated. I pray  
At her lotus-feet, seeking her blessings.  
She'll remove my sorrows, redeem my sins  
And protect me from Yama's wrath.  
I take refuge at the lotus-feet of Baseli,  
Says Sarala Das with a basil garland  
Around his neck.

X X X

Sage Shuka continued:

'The battle between the demons and the *yoginis*  
Took a violent turn as Ugratara and Kantimala  
Had a face-off in the battlefield. Kantimala  
And his five lakh soldiers launched a severe  
Attack on Ugratara, raising a battle cry that  
Deafened the sky. She mused, "This Kantimala  
Is a burden on the earth. He has the benefit  
Of Lord Shiva's boon that no one could kill him  
In war." As a suitable alternative to warfare,  
She changed herself into a luscious young woman,  
As radiant as the lightning. Overpowered by  
Her beauty, Kantimala passed out. Regaining  
His consciousness, he begged her, "Dear me!  
I long for your company. Be kind to me. I fall  
At your feet and earnestly ask for your love."

Ugratara told him, "I've taken a vow that I'll  
 Marry only him who fulfils my desire." Kantimala  
 Promptly replied, "I'll do as you say. O dear!  
 Tell me what you want." Ugratara said,  
 "You've to carry me on your shoulders, and, not  
 Caring for others' ridicule, take me to the Mandara  
 Mountain. Then only I can become your wife."  
 Promising to obey her, he said, "Come, sit on  
 My shoulders." She asked him to wait until  
 Sunset to avoid public attention. When the sun  
 Went down, Kantimala carried her on his  
 Shoulders and walked on. When they reached  
 Behind the Vindhyagiri mountain, to the south  
 Of Lakshmibhadra river, near Kulabati Patna,  
 She said, "It aches me to sit on you so long;  
 Let me stand on your shoulders for a while."  
 Kantimala suggested, "If you don't feel comfortable  
 With my shoulders, you may get onto my head."  
 O Learned ones! See, how far the lust for  
 A woman can lead a man to. It pulls him like  
 A rope pulling a bullock. She pressed his shoulders  
 With her hands with a roar. Suddenly the sky  
 Was flooded with her radiance and the demon  
 Sank into the netherworld. Seeing Kantimala  
 Dead, the gods rejoiced and strew flowers  
 On her. Thirty-three crores of gods sang  
 In chorus, "O Goddess! You saved us  
 From the hands of the wicked demon."  
 The battle continued as usual, Raktabirjya  
 Had no knowledge of Kantimala's death. Of the five  
 Commanders Mahisa had sent there, three were,  
 By then, dead. Raktabirjya and Biraghanta were



The only ones who continued to fight. Biraghanta  
 Was mightier than the gods; he did not count  
 Indra, the Moon and Shiva among his equals. Hissing  
 Like an angry snake, Raktabirjya, armed with  
 Bow, arrow and mace, challenged Narayani.  
 As a mountain girdled by the rainwater, he was  
 Surrounded by a large band of archers. He looked  
 As radiant as pomegranate flowers. Decked in  
 Flowers of multiple colours, he wore a garland,  
 Earrings and a waist band of hibiscus flowers.  
 Looking like the rising sun, he directed his chariot,  
 Pulled by one crore lions, to the abode of the sun.

Riding Garuda and armed with conch,  
 Wheel, the *gandiba* bow and mace, Narayani  
 Confronted Raktabirjya. As she cried out,  
 "Hurry up! Eat them!" the flock of bloodthirsty  
*Yoginis* spread over the whole sky. Some of them  
 Chased the demons, ululating loudly. Some had  
 Smeared holy ashes on their foreheads; others  
 Had tied a piece of cloth around their necks  
 And worn loin-clothes. With tridents and cutlasses  
 In their hands, they swooped on the demons like  
 A cast of hawks. They swallowed thousands of arrows  
 Fired at them and withstood the strike of the maces.  
 Disarming the demons completely, Maheswari  
 Landed blows on the demons that sprawled them  
 Onto the ground, upturned. Then Barahi pounced  
 On them, tore their hearts apart and drank  
 Their blood. Then, she caught some more by  
 The hair, spinned them in the air and consumed  
 Mouthfuls of their flesh. The *yoginis* beat

Many demons with maces, pulling out their hearts  
 With their teeth. In fear, the demons began  
 To flee, but the *yoginis* caught them from behind  
 And bit off their flesh. Their cry "Catch them!  
 Kill them!" filled the air. Like the birds who  
 Had lost their nests, the demon soldiers  
 Scattered around in a state of confusion.

A fierce battle ensued between Raktabirjya  
 And Narayani, each shooting arrows at  
 The other. Raktabirjya tried all kinds of arrows  
 On her, such as iron arrow, *parbata* arrow,  
*Rudra* arrow and *bajrasuchi* arrow, all of which  
 Were either blocked or destroyed by Narayani  
 In the midway. With her *tikshnamuna* arrow  
 She destroyed his bow. The demon, then, drew  
 His sword and struck at her. Making herself  
 Invisible, she destroyed his sword with thunder.  
 In anger, the demon took his mace and struck  
 At Garuda, who fell unconscious. Seeing that  
 Narayani had lost her carrier, Durga sent her  
 A lion to ride on. Riding the lion, she hit him  
 With her cutlass that broke his mace in half.  
 Another strike with the cutlass chopped off  
 His head into two parts. Like two mountains,  
 They fell from the sky with a deafening noise.  
 A great cheer went up from the gods in heaven,  
 Who showered praises on her.'

I bow to you, O Narayani! You've no  
 Beginning, nor end. You're the incarnation  
 Of Brahma and Vishnu, the slayer of Raktabirjya

And the destroyer of the demons. You're Kankali,  
 Betali and Dakeswari. You're dressed in  
 Red silk with a garland of heads around your  
 Neck. Your face looks like the moon; you're  
 Mohini. Brahma is unable to describe your  
 Glory. How can a human being, such as I'm,  
 Do it? You're the Saviour; you're Sarala Chandi  
 Of Jankherpur, says Sarala Das.

Hearing from Shuka the news of the battle,  
 Parikshit said, 'O sage! I feel blessed to learn  
 About Durga's heroic feats. Tell me, what followed  
 Thereafter.' Shuka said, 'Listening to it, your sins  
 Will be redeemed. Wherever Raktabirjya's blood  
 Fell, thousands of Raktabirjyas were born from  
 There. Wherever you look around the battlefield  
 Of five *yojanas*, you'll find Raktabirjya everywhere.  
 Each of them was armed with *konta*, sword, mace,  
 Spade and hammer. The battlefield resonated  
 With their war cry. From the summit of Ratnagiri  
 Durga called out to the *yoginis*, "Chase them!  
 Kill them!" At which the sixty-four *yoginis*  
 Knifed into the crowd of Raktabirjyas, killing  
 Them and eating up their flesh and bones.  
 But, from their blood that fell to the ground,  
 Thousands of Raktabirjyas showed up.  
 The gods from heaven warned the *yoginis*,  
 "It's from his blood that thousands are born.  
 Don't let their heads fall to the ground."  
 Realizing that it was too hard a task for them,  
 To do, Durga produced one lakh *dakinis* from  
 Her body. She commanded them, "Lie on the ground

And suck every drop of blood that falls from  
 The demon's body." The *dakinis* did as she said  
 And sucked the blood, collecting them with  
 The help of their cutlasses. For three days  
 The battle continued; still Raktabirjya  
 Could not be eliminated.

Extremely worried, Durga shook her  
 Sword from which Kalika appeared.  
 Her hands were upraised, hair tousled  
 And complexion dark. She hid herself inside  
 Narayani's cutlass and devoured the entrails  
 Of each demon killed by Narayani. Chamunda,  
 Kalika, Kali, Betali, Maheswari, Mahamaya, Dakeswari  
 And Bhadrakali gobbled down the demons, like  
 Rahu swallowing the moon, sticking out his  
 Tongue. Grabbing ten to twenty demons at a time,  
 They broke their hands and gnawed them piece  
 By piece to satisfy their infinite hunger.  
 The fierce-looking *dakinis* revelled in killing  
 And consuming the flesh, bones and blood  
 Of the demons. It was a ghastly sight to see someone  
 Swallowing a demon, his head sticking out of  
 Her mouth. Someone had swallowed the legs  
 Of the demon while his hands were hanging from  
 Her mouth. Another was gnawing at the ribs  
 Of a demon. Someone had wrung a demon's neck  
 And tucked him under her arm.'

O Noble ones! The *yoginis* changed their  
 Form from time to time. How far can I go with  
 The details? I'm not able to narrate every bit

Of what Katyayani had told me. That's as vast  
 As the ocean. The more you say, the more is  
 Left unsaid. Listening to Chandika's story  
 Redeems your sins. It bestows on you all that  
 You crave for: righteousness, wealth, joy,  
 Salvation and children. Sarala Das sings  
 Her glory with great devotion.

'O Parikshit! Those who read this scripture,  
 The pangs of old age and sickness do not touch  
 Them. You feel as if nectar is showered on you.'

X X X

Learning from Shuka that the battle remained  
 Inconclusive for three days, Parikshit said, 'Never  
 In my life had I heard of such things happening.  
 Who did Raktabirjya worship? How could he turn  
 To thousands after being killed? O Vyasa's son!  
 Pray, tell me what does the scripture say about it.'  
 At this, Parasara's son meditated on Vyasa for  
 A while, who bestowed on him the power to see  
 The past and the future. Then, he explained:

'It was the beginning of Satya Yuga, says  
*Vishnu Purana*, when the demons, scared of Vishnu,  
 Used to please Shiva and Brahma by their devotion.  
 For nine thousand years, Raktabirjya worshipped  
 Brahma who offered him a boon. Raktabirjya  
 Begged him, "Grant me the boon that I won't be killed  
 By Vishnu's wheel or thunder or any other weapon  
 Of the gods. Fire won't burn me; water won't  
 Drown me, nor the curse of the gods will harm

Me. I'll be unbeaten in war in the three worlds.  
 I'll defeat the Moon and the Sun, and King of Death  
 Won't frighten me. There is one thing else,  
 I won't be slain by a man; if my blood  
 Falls on the ground, I'll rise out of it in thousands.  
 May my blood change into sperm from which  
 The likes of me will be born." As Brahma had  
 Vowed to fulfil his wishes, he granted him  
 All that he asked for. To bring about a quick  
 End to the battle, Durga commanded the *yoginis*  
 And *dakinis* to pounce on Raktabirjya one by  
 One. During his fight with Narayani, aided by  
*Yoginis* and *dakinis*, Raktabirjya was slain.  
 O Parikshit! Those who hear the story of his  
 Death are not subject to Yama's anger.

Seeing Raktabirjya dead, Biraghanta  
 Rushed to Narayani, seeking revenge. Narayani  
 Called out "Kill him!" At this, the *yoginis* and *dakinis*  
 Surrounded the demons, a hundred of them for  
 Each demon. The bodies of the demons, as stiff  
 As thunder, turned soft when Narayani's  
 Forces touched them. The *dakinis* swallowed  
 Many of the demons; the more they ate, the hungrier  
 They became. They had their faces daubed with  
 Vermilion and their outstretched tongues  
 Kept wagging for the blood of the demons. Scared,  
 Many demons left the battlefield, leaving Biraghanta  
 Behind, who was still battling hard. Narayani  
 Commanded Bhadrakali, "Now it is your turn  
 To take over." Accompanied by Chamunda, Chachika,  
 Ambika, Ugratara, Kankali and Betali, Bhadrakali

Surrounded the enemy. Biraghanta and his soldiers  
 Put up a brave fight, shooting lakhs of arrows  
 At Bhadrakali who foiled their attack successfully.

Bhadrakali charged at Biraghanta  
 And knocked the camel he was riding down  
 To the ground. Leaving his carrier, Biraghanta  
 Hurried to his chariot, from where he fired  
 Five thousand arrows at a time at Bhadrakali.  
 Tripura managed to stop them while Chamunda  
 Struck his chariot with her sword so forcefully  
 That it fell into pieces. As Biraghanta fell down,  
 The sixty-four *yoginis* surrounded him.  
 Tripura held his left arm, Ugratara the right,  
 Baseli held his waist and Bhadrakali  
 Pulled out pieces of flesh from his body with  
 Her teeth. The two Chandis pulled out his arms;  
 They took away his head and legs and hurled  
 His torso at the demon soldiers who fell many  
*Yojanas* away. A great warrior, such as  
 Biraghanta, who was mightier than Indra,  
 Lost the battle and fell dead at last. The demons  
 Who survived began to flee, but the *yoginis*  
 Caught them from behind and finished them off.

Kala and Bikala, Mahisa's messengers,  
 Escaped from their hideouts in the mountain  
 And left for Jenabati in a hurry. Reaching there,  
 They informed Mahisasura, "O Lord!  
 All of your commanders such as Raktabirjya,  
 Kantimala, Bidulaksha, Biraghanta and Kaladanda  
 Have lost their lives in war. There is no trace

Of their skin, flesh and bones anymore.”  
 Awestruck, Mahisa fell from his throne, as if  
 He was hit by a thunderbolt. Kala raised him  
 To his feet and sprinkled some water on his face.  
 He brought him round and made him sit on  
 The throne. Mahisa knelt down, and, beating his brow,  
 Said mournfully, “We belong to Rahu’s family  
 And Kashyap’s clan. Simhika, Daksha’s daughter,  
 Is our progenitor. We provoked the Sun and the Moon  
 To act against us. We were hostile to Indra as  
 He killed Jambu. In our attempt to occupy heaven,  
 We’ve reduced ourselves to the condition we’re  
 In now. Proud of being immortal, we chose  
 The path of wickedness. Our whole clan is wiped out  
 As we incurred Narayana’s displeasure. Brahma  
 Gave me his word that I won’t be slain by Vishnu,  
 Brahma, Indra and the Sun, that the deluge won’t  
 Destroy me, and that none in the three worlds will  
 Defeat me. All my devotions to him have come  
 To a naught.” Mahisa told this in the assembly  
 Of his courtiers. Andhaka, his minister, told him,  
 With folded hands, “You gambled away all your  
 Assets in the process. The gods tricked you into  
 Losing everything. The woman you took into  
 Confidence deceived you outright.  
 You reaped what you had sown.”



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## The Tale of Bailochana

Sage Shuka said, 'Andhaka was telling  
Mahisasura, "Long ago there was a king named  
Bailochana who was as powerful as he was  
Boastful. He sat in meditation for three  
Thousand years, praying to Brahma who,  
Pleased with his devotion, granted him a boon  
That he would be immortal, that he won't die  
From snakebite, Yama can't take his life,  
Nor water can drown him to death, that  
Neither Vishnu's wheel nor Shiva's weapons can  
Pierce into his body and that he won't be slain  
By man. Scared of him, the gods took shelter  
In the waters of the sea and prayed to Vishnu  
To save them. To relieve the gods of their agony,  
Vishnu changed himself into a young woman  
Of matchless beauty, naming himself as  
Malati. Malati lived in the Nilandi forest,  
To which Bailochana would come on hunting.

On a Sunday, the thirteenth day  
Of the bright fortnight of Phalguna, Bailochana  
Met Malati while travelling through the forest.  
Could a man ever ignore the seductions  
Of a woman who was as beautiful as she was?  
Enchanted by her beauty, Bailochana fell  
In love with her. Oblivious of his power  
And position, he started burning in the flames  
Of lust. O Lord! You were in the same situation  
As he was. Chanda and Munda, driven by  
Their sexual desire, not only got themselves  
Killed, but also brought death upon those who  
Accompanied them. O Lord! It seems you don't  
Learn anything from it. Great warriors, such as  
Sumbha and Nishumbha did the same mistake  
And lost their lives."

Mahisasura interrupted, "Tell me,  
What happened to Bailochana and Malati after  
They met each other." Andhaka resumed,  
"In all ages, men have been deceived by women.  
Seeing Bailochana completely overpowered by  
The passion of love, she asked him to take  
A vow if he wanted to have her. Bailochana  
Vowed to marry her and abandon the wives  
He had already had. His state of mind during  
Those times was too difficult to be explained.  
At the time, I was his minister. One day he  
Came to me with the girl; he told me how her  
Beauty had overwhelmed him. I was sorry  
To see the emperor of nine islands not

A bit interested in the affairs of his kingdom.  
I was asked to see to that, which I did. The love  
Between them grew with years. In course  
Of time she became pregnant. The king took  
All steps to make her happy. It was a time  
Of great rejoicing in the kingdom. He performed  
All the rites, as was the custom, with austerity.  
It went on like this for nine months. On  
The eleventh day of the bright fortnight of Jyeshtha,  
The king took Malati into his lap and expressed  
His desire to go hunting for a day.  
Malati said, 'Your absence for a moment bears  
Heavily on me. I'll be waiting for you without  
Food until you return.'

Listen, Mahisasura! Her innocence  
And loyalty was a complete sham; her real  
Intention was to find ways and means to kill  
Him. She asked, 'How will I know if there is  
A threat to your life in the forest?' To which  
He replied, 'Brahma's boon ensures that  
I'll outlive the four ages; that Brahma, Vishnu  
And Maheswara won't be able to kill me.  
Neither shall I be burnt by fire, nor can  
A sword pierce into me. The deluge cannot  
Drown me. I won't die by day, nor by night;  
Not inside the house, nor outside. No man  
Can kill me. Listen, dear! Brahma has planted  
A brown hair on my head which is the secret  
Of my death. I'll die only if a woman plucks  
It out.' Hearing it, she heaved a sigh of relief.  
While leaving for the forest he kissed her

On her cheeks and she bade him farewell,  
Wishing him the best of luck.

Riding a horse and armed with sword, *konta*,  
Bow and arrow, Bailochana set out for the forest.  
Narayana, alias Malati, displayed an illusion  
That made the wild animals disappear. Bailochana,  
In spite of trying hard, found none to kill. In  
The meantime, Narayana filled his head with lice,  
Which started itching severely. Returning home,  
He finished his bath and meal. After passing some  
Pleasant moments with Malati, he complained  
To her, 'Why does my head itch?' 'There must be  
Lice in your hair,' so saying, she asked him  
To wait a while. She started combing his hair with  
An ivory comb. She went on picking the lice and  
Killing them. Bailochana was lying with his back  
Towards the house, eyes towards outside. The upper  
Part of his body was lying outside and the feet  
Inside the house. Malati said, 'O dear! It's  
Twilight already.' But Bailochana asked her  
To concentrate on killing the lice. While searching for  
The lice, she located the brown hair. While  
Doing it, suddenly she took her real form,  
That of Narayana, her body pervading the sky.  
She held the brown hair firmly with her fingers.  
Bailochana, inebriated, was lying subconscious  
While Malati got onto his back, pressing her feet  
On his head. Letting out a roar, she pulled out  
The hair with all her might. The demon, with  
A howl, breathed his last.

Listen, Mahisasura! Bailochana fell  
 Victim to a woman's evil designs. This is  
 What happens to the boons given by the gods.  
 I'm a witness to it. Take the case of Shumbha  
 And Nishumbha. They were assured that  
 They won't die unless they put their hands on  
 Each other's head. That woman tricked them  
 Into doing it. Another example is of Raktabirjya  
 Who was too formidable to concede defeat to anyone.  
 But he lost the battle and his life as well.  
 Why don't the demons understand this simple  
 Thing that life and death follow each other,  
 That night comes after day and misfortune  
 Follows fortune?"

Mahisasura replied, "I'd never imagined  
 That a mere woman could be the cause of the death  
 Of my warriors and my present worry,  
 My chief concern is how to protect  
 Myself. I'll leave my kingdom and take shelter  
 In the sea." Moved by the anguished words  
 Of their king, the demon warriors pledged  
 To avenge the loss. Among them were  
 Jamaghanta, Kalabimochana, Kankasura,  
 Dhumralochana, Chandasura, Prachandasura,  
 Lohasura, Dhanka, Bankasura, Bhaskar,  
 Bajranga, Kalanala, Batasura, Meghasura,  
 Bakasura, Ashwamukha, Gajamukha, Srikalamukha,  
 And Grudhramukha. Kalabimochana prayed  
 To the king, "Command us, O King! We'll fetch her  
 Instantly." Mahisasura, broken down in grief,  
 Said, "What price pride and fame! Those who

Carried out my command and went there, never  
 Returned. I won't do the same thing again. If  
 You so wish, you may go on your own."  
 Twenty-eight commanders who were not counted  
 Either among gods or demons, with their  
 Army, set out for their destination, raising  
 A war cry. They looked like a moving sea. Riding  
 Elephants, horses and lions and armed with  
 Swords, *lankia* and *konta*, they marched along.  
 The earth resonated with their angry cry.  
 Sahasrasira was leading from the front;  
 He had two thousand heads and an equal  
 Number of hands, his body glittering like  
 The Subarnakuta mountain. He had a bow in  
 Each of his hands; the twangs of his bows deafened  
 The three worlds. The column of soldiers covered  
 Five *yojanas* of land, all of whom were drunken  
 And terrible-looking. Reaching Ratnagiri, they  
 Surrounded the mountain raising a great din.

From the summit of the mountain,  
 Narayani was watching the movement of the demons.  
 At the time all the yoginis were drinking and dancing.  
 The demons could hear their noise of revelry clearly.  
 Climbing up the mountain, Sahasrasira went over  
 And asked her, "O strange woman! Where have you  
 Come from? You killed all our commanders  
 By deceiving them." With a smile, she said,  
 "No one in the world stays forever. Those who  
 Are born, must die. That Brahma who promised  
 You immortality dies every one crore years.  
 The life of Shiva, the greatest of all *yogis*,

Comes to an end every one thousand  
 And seventy-two years. Likewise,  
 The period of Indra's life is one *padma*  
 Years. And, so also, the *dikpalas* die and a new  
 Set of them is born. Therefore, to think that  
 You'll never die is nothing but stupidity.  
 Why do you blame me unnecessarily? All of us  
 Who have come to this world are destined to die.  
 He who offered you the boon, has told a lie.  
 You've already lived long, now it's time for  
 You to die." Hearing this, Kalabimochana  
 Warned her, "If all of us are to die, why should  
 You be allowed to live? Woman is the symbol  
 Of deceit and wickedness. Had we come here  
 Earlier, you would have seen how powerful  
 We are. Considering you a mere woman,  
 We left you unhurt. And that allowed you  
 To display your evil designs." She said,  
 "Listen, O foes of the gods! We are not the kind  
 Of women you think us to be. As mothers,  
 We bring you to the earth; as wives, we  
 Spend nights with you; as Kalika, we kill you;  
 And as fire, we burn you after you die.  
 You've beginning and end, but we're the middle.  
 We create and we destroy. Your evil doings  
 Quicken the process of your death. We represent  
 The eternal motherhood, we're *yoginis*, the  
 Symbols of purity. Our ways are inscrutable.  
 Now, Narayani of Kali Yuga will devour  
 All of you." Riled up, Kalabimochana  
 Commanded his army to mount an attack on her.

O Parikshit! In response to the commander's  
 Call, the demons climbed up the mountain.  
 Kalabimochana had seventy crore soldiers,  
 Dhumralochana had fifty crores; Bakasura  
 One *padma*; Dhankasura three *padmas*;  
 Bhogasura one *padma*; Udeka seven lakhs;  
 Prachandasura one *mebaksha*; Chamara Danda  
 Three *padmas*; Chandalia ninety crores; Bajranga  
 Nine *sagaras*; Utpata, Mahisasura's grandson  
 Five *sagaras*; Samudrasura, the king's uncle,  
 Three *sagaras*; Mahisasura's twenty-one *sagaras*;  
 Jalamanthana one *padma*; Dengasura five *padmas*;  
 Bengasura nine *sagaras*; Kankasura fifty crores;  
 And Kodasura had fifty crores soldiers.  
 They launched an all-out attack on Narayani.'



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## The Demon Commanders Challenge Durga

Sage Shuka continued:

‘Listen, O King! Besides Kalabimochana, there  
Were many other commanders in Mahisasura’s  
Army, each of them controlling his own troops.  
Seated on Ratnagiri, Durga was watching  
Sahasrasira’s troops who had occupied the space  
Of sixty-five *yojanas* between Lakshmibhadra  
And Saraswati rivers. Terrified by the sight  
Of the demon forces, the gods left their heavenly  
Abode and took shelter behind the south peak  
Of the Malayagiri mountain. They whispered  
Among themselves, “When thirty-three crores  
Of gods fled their abode in fear, how is it that  
The *yoginis* are least afraid of them?” Brahma  
Told them, “The Goddess is powerful enough  
To destroy all of them in a moment.” Indra advised  
Them, “Have patience. You’ll see many interesting  
Things happening today.”

Curious, Parikshit asked the sage,  
 'What did Durga do when she saw the demons  
 Besieging the mountain?' To which Shuka replied,  
 'Her face was flushed with anger to see this.  
 In addition to the sixty-four *yoginis* she already  
 Had, she produced many more goddesses from  
 Her body: Four *padmas* of Brahmayani, each with  
 Eight hands and armed with the *ajagaba* bow  
 And arrow; one *padma* of Rudrayani with  
 Mace, halberd, *konta*, arrow and sword;  
 Fifty-six crores of Narayani with four hands  
 And armed with *gandiba* bow, *kaumudi* mace  
 And riding Garuda; sixty-four crores  
 Of Indrayani, each having eight hands,  
 Carrying bow, arrow and snare and Airavata  
 As carrier; fourteen crores of Bhairabi, each  
 With one leg, four hands, three eyes on her  
 Forehead with the *kodanda* bow, lance, halberd  
 And *dambaru* in her hands, clad in white  
 And riding a bullock; nine crores of Barahi  
 Having one hundred heads and two hundred  
 Hands, terrible-looking, with weapons,  
 Such as spade, axe and dagger and adorned  
 With gem earrings; five hundred of Jala  
 Devi, decked in jewels and armed with  
 A snare; nine crores of Katyayani, their  
 Hair loosened and tongue wagging; fifty  
 Crores of Kothari; nine crores of *dakinis*;  
 Five *sagaras* of *pichasunis* under the command  
 Of Ugratara; three *sagaras* of Kankali,  
 Commanded by Baseli; seven *padmas*  
 Of Mekhali, controlled by Bhadrakali; ninety

Crores of Mahakhela commanded by Hingula;  
 Nine *sagaras* of Chandis with the body  
 Of cobra; three *sagaras* with dog's body;  
 Boar-faced and elephant-faced Chandis, their  
 Faces daubed with vermilion having Jambuswari  
 As their commander; fierce-looking Chandis  
 With human body, commanded by Chhaya;  
 One *padma* of Pingalakshi with the face of a swine;  
 Three *padmas* of Chandis riding tigers with  
 Chachika as their commander; one *padma*  
 Of Chandis with the face of a bear, ruled by  
 Bikarali; hundred crores of lion-riding  
 Chandis commanded by Mahamaya; nine *padmas*  
 Of Chandis commanded by Kumari; nine lakhs  
 Of Dakeswari under the command of Chandika;  
 Nine lakh Chandis, cat-faced, controlled by Pingalakshi;  
 And one hundred lakhs of Chandis, their faces like  
 That of a crow, looked after by Biraja. Besides,  
 There were goddesses, such as Ananta, Bijaya,  
 Jateswari, Ketuka, Dakshini, Uttarai, Maha  
 Barahi and Patalabasini.'

The list of the goddesses is too long to be  
 Cited fully. Bowing at their feet, Sudramuni  
 Sarala Das seeks their blessings.

x x x

Sage Shuka continued:

'Listen, O King! From Durga's body so many  
 Goddesses were born. As soon as they were born,  
 They begged Durga for food to eat. Pointing at  
 The demon soldiers, Durga told them, "Here is

Your food. Share it among yourselves. Don't  
 Worry if you find it not enough; there's more  
 In store for you." As she finished, they swept  
 The sky and the four mountains. Their hair  
 Dishevelled and tongues outstretched, they  
 Swooped on the demons like hawks, with daggers  
 And cutlasses in their hands. The sixty-four  
 Yoginis, too, jumped from the mountain  
 And joined them. Each of them was assigned  
 A specific task, to take on a particular  
 Commander and his troops, kill them and eat  
 Them up: Narayani for Kalabimochana; Baseli  
 For Sahasrasira; Ugratara for Bhaskar;  
 Tripura for Pingalasura and Manasura;  
 Kothari for Satamukha; Maruchi for Jamaghanta;  
 Maruti for Jayasingha; Bhairabi for Kapilasingha;  
 Bhagabati for Jagasura; Pingalakshi for Mahisira;  
 Chachika for Yojanabahu; Chhaya for Bakasura;  
 Kalika for Parbataura; and Polama for  
 Jatasura. Durga told them, "Keeping in mind  
 The number of the demons, I've produced so many  
 Goddesses. They may fall short of your  
 Need as you can consume mountains and seas."

Assignments completed, the *yoginis* swooped  
 On the demons who retaliated, striking them with  
 Maces that fell into pieces as they touched the *yoginis'*  
 Bodies. With no weapons to fight with, they fell  
 Victims to the *yoginis* who ate them up. But  
 There was no sign of a let-up in their aggression.  
 One demon killed, hundreds would come up.  
 The arrows they fired at the *yoginis* came as

The rain from the sky. The exchange of arrows  
 Hid the sun from view. All their weapons, such  
 As arrows, *konta*, maces and crowbars were  
 Crushed to dust. The *yoginis* treated them as if  
 They were a herd of goats, tossing them into the air  
 And swallowing them as they fell. Eighty lakh  
 Warriors of Dhankasura were consumed by  
 Kothari alone. The *yoginis* revelled in drinking,  
 Dancing, running around and singing. The place  
 Was upbeat with the noise of ululation  
 And *dambaru*. They devoured whatever came  
 Their way - elephants, horses and chariots. Having  
 Lost his troops, Dhankasura fought with the *yoginis*  
 With his unwieldy mace, but the mace, as huge as  
 A mountain, was crushed to powder. Dhankasura  
 Rushed forward to swallow the *yoginis*, but Polama  
 And Marakama pulled his feet apart that ripped  
 Him in half. Then, they began to chew a part  
 Each. Seeing Dhankasura dead, Brahma showered  
 Praises on Kothari and prayed to her, "Glory  
 To Kothari who is also known as Katakshi,  
 Matangi, Kamakshi, Kamaseni and Mohini!  
 You've done a great service to us by slaying  
 The wicked demon."

O Noble ones! How can a feeble man,  
 Such as I am, describe her, to whom Brahma  
 Says his prayers? I take refuge at Sri Kothari's  
 Feet, says Sarala Das with a basil garland  
 Around his neck.

Shuka continued:

'I told you about the glorious deeds of Kothari  
Whom Brahma had named Mohini. She relieved  
The sages and hermits of Dhankasura's oppression.  
After his death, they resumed their spiritual activities  
Without fear and interference.

The fall of Dhankasura provoked  
Triambikasura to challenge the *yoginis*. His head  
Touched the sky, his body occupied the space  
Between the earth and the sky that made the sun  
Invisible. Seeing him, Durga exclaimed, "What  
A boastful demon, showing off his might before  
Me! O Marakama! Kill him!" Marakama, armed  
With mace, club, bow, quiver and cutlass, rushed  
Towards him, riding a wild elephant. She expanded  
Herself to the size of the demon and attacked him with  
The mace. But, before it could hit him, he caught  
It with his left hand and dealt her with a blow;  
The mountains rocked with the noise it created.  
Marakama's body was too strong to be harmed by it.  
His attempt to hit her again also failed. Then, he shot at  
Her a fire arrow which caused fire as it reached  
Her, but it was put out on its own. Then, he struck  
Her with a pair of unwieldy maces that were turned  
To dust by the Goddess. His maces broken, he picked  
A *konta* and a club and went on beating her  
Several times which proved to be of no use.  
The battle continued until late into night,  
The demons showing no sign of retreat. When  
All his weapons were exhausted, he stood like  
A burnt-out mountain. It was then that she

Struck her sword at his chest. It struck  
 The ground before him that made him fall down  
 On his back. Markama pounced on his chest  
 And pushed her jaws into it and tore it apart.  
 Then, she devoured his flesh, skin, bones and blood.  
 For killing Triambikasura, she was called Triambika.  
 With the demon gone, the earth heaved a sigh  
 Of relief and she felt happy and satisfied.'

Sudramuni Sarala Das prays at her feet  
 Day in and day out, seeking her blessings.

x x x

'Triambikasura had sixty-five thousand  
 Warriors, each mightier than the other.  
 They went on attacking Marakama with halberd,  
 Spade and mace. From the summit of Vindhyagiri  
 Mahamaya was watching how three *koshas*  
 Of land was soaked with blood. She jumped from  
 The mountain with an open mouth that covered  
 The earth and the sky. She swallowed the demons  
 In large numbers, like the earth soaking  
 The rain. The demons and all their weapons  
 Went into her belly. She devoured their flesh,  
 Bones and entrails; not even a drop of blood  
 Was left over.

O Parikshit! Who is able to narrate  
 The battle of Chandis in words? Bajranga  
 And Bhaskar, accompanied by fifteen *sagaras*  
 Of warriors appeared in the battlefield.  
 O King! As the sea stops at the shore, they

Stood before the *yoginis* as long as seven  
 Mandara mountains. Seeing the demons in  
 High spirits, Durga produced Jayachandi  
 And Ramachandi from her throat. She asked  
 The seven sisters, namely, Vindhyauni,  
 Kumari, Maruchi, Amarai, Chamai, Chinai,  
 Kapadai and Bipulai to proceed and finish off  
 The warriors of Bajranga and Bhaskar.  
 The seven sisters, thirsty for blood, spread over  
 The whole battlefield. Listen, O King, to the glorious  
 Acts of Jayachandi who turned to sixty young  
 Women. With their sidelong looks and lovely  
 Postures, they seduced the demons into leaving  
 Their weapons and carriers and falling in  
 Love with them. Making friends with the demons,  
 They hooked their arms around them and plucked  
 Out their eyes with their fingernails. Tossing  
 Them into the air, they caught them with their mouths  
 As they fell. On the pretext of kissing, they chewed  
 Their heads. Tearing the demons apart, they shared  
 Their flesh among themselves. In a moment,  
 One lakh demons perished and were eaten up;  
 Still the *yoginis'* hunger was as before. It seemed  
 Like a battle between cranes and hawks.  
 Jayachandi was such a Goddess that after drinking  
 A sea of blood, she remained as thirsty.

Without having to fight, Jayachandi,  
 Bewitching the demons by her beauty,  
 Left them burning in the flames of lust.  
 Taking this opportunity,  
 She called out to Barahi, Balai, Tarai, Jarai,



Rankai, Shamalai, Dulanai, Amarai, Harai,  
 Kamai, Bimalai, Banai and Chachikai.  
 She commanded them to attack them and eat them  
 Up. They flew into the sky, and, accompanied by  
 Ugratara, Marakama, Bhairabi, Baseli, Ambika,  
 Kothari and Chamunda, fought with the demons  
 With battleaxe, dagger, cutlass and sword.  
 There were twenty-eight Chandis to battle  
 With twenty-eight demon commanders.  
 Their bodies were smeared with blood and face  
 With vermilion. Among the sounds of *changu*,  
*Ghumra*, *mridanga* and *damandi*, the inebriated  
 Chandis danced wildly. Unafraid of the demons,  
 They caused heavy casualties in a short time.  
 Ugratara alone swallowed one lakh warriors.  
 They devoured so many of them,  
 Still their hunger was not satisfied.  
 They contained twenty-five kinds of fire in them;  
 Whatever they ate, it was burnt down instantly.

Seeing their warriors being slain  
 In large numbers, Bajranga and Bhaskar  
 Rained down arrows on Jayachandi  
 And Ramachandi. Ramachandi battled  
 With Bajranga and Jayachandi took on  
 Bhaskara, while the rest of the *yoginis*  
 Created panic among their warriors. Ramachandi  
 Shot an arrow at Bajranga that pierced  
 Into his heart. As he fell on his back,  
 She pounced on his chest and killed him.  
 He had worshipped Brahma for nine thousand years  
 And was granted the boon that his body would be

As strong as thunder, and that no weapon would  
Pierce it. It was to be decimated, therefore, by  
Chandi's superior power. The gods were pleased  
To see Bajranga put to death and they praised  
Her with love and respect.'

Glory to Ramachandi, the harbinger of peace  
And happiness! Chanting her name removes all  
Obstacles in one's life. She is Remover of sorrows  
And the Protector of her devotees from Yama's wrath.  
She rewards them with wealth and children.  
O Noble ones! Your devotion to her will fulfil  
All your wishes.

Thus says Sarala Das.

x x x

'Listen, Parikshit!' said Sage Shuka,  
'Ramachandi's glory is too great to be put in  
Words. As the battle between Jayachandi and Bhaskar  
Ensued, the sun went down. Bhaskar tried on  
Her all kinds of weapons, such as mace, hammer,  
*Konta*, crowbar and sword. But none of them  
Could cause damage to her body. He took the bow  
And fired arrows at her; the twangs of his bow  
Deafened the world. But it was in vain. Then,  
With a pair of wieldy iron maces, he hammered  
Jayachandi, who returned it with the strike  
Of another couple of maces of the same size.  
The collision of four maces gave out a loud  
Clank and sparked, lighting the whole battlefield.  
When the weapons broke and fell into pieces,

Bhaskar cocked his sword; his feet on the earth  
And head touching the sky. Terrified by  
His huge shape, the gods sent her the Pushpak  
Chariot. Offering her some jewellery, Matali  
Told her, "Mother! Save the gods from the wicked  
Demon who doesn't allow them to enter heaven.  
Let me tell you about his past life.  
For fifteen thousand years, he worshipped  
The Sun, living only on iron dust. He cut  
Pieces of flesh from his body and consigned  
It to the holy fire, as a part of his devotion.  
Every piece of flesh he cut was replaced  
By new ones at every sunrise.  
He gave up the company of women, food  
And sleep, and lay in the burning fire.  
Pleased with his steadfast devotion,  
The Sun appeared before him on a Sunday,  
The full moon day of the month of Magha. When  
He sprinkled some nectar on him, the demon  
Rose from fire; the size of his body was  
One thousand times greater than what  
It was before. O Mother! When the Sun offered  
Him a boon, he prayed, 'O Lord! I wish  
To be named after you; I'll be known as Bhaskar  
Henceforward. Make me as powerful as you are,  
So that no one will be able to defeat me in the three  
Worlds. I won't die by the day, nor by the night.  
I'll not be killed by a man. My body will be  
As strong as thunder and I'll live as long as  
You exist.' 'So be it,' saying so, Sajna's consort  
Left for his heavenly abode. O Mother! He'll cause  
Trouble to you in many ways. I suggest to you

To remain in the sky in this flying chariot  
 And come down only when it is past fifty-seven  
*Lita* in the evening. That's the appropriate moment  
 To kill the demon. Beware that he won't die  
 Either by the day or by the night." So saying, he left.  
 Positioning herself in the sky, she took fifty  
 Bows in her left hand, shooting arrows at the demon  
 Incessantly. On the other hand, Bhaskar's arrows  
 Broke into pieces as they hit her body. Desperate,  
 The demon charged at her with the Sun's wheel  
 From which no one was able to escape.  
 Having no other alternative, she flew down into  
 Water with her chariot, where  
 The wheel would not reach.

The gods were praising her:  
 "As long as the sun and the moon exist,  
 Jayachandi's benevolence will never lessen.  
 She protects her devotees from their enemies.  
 O warriors! Chant her name  
 And you'll win a victory in war.  
 Glory to Katyayani! Glory to Chandi! Glory to Hari,  
 The Remover of human sorrows and sufferings."

Putting on a basil garland around  
 His neck, Sudramuni Sarala Das bows  
 At Jayachandi's lotus-feet.

x x x

Curious to learn more from the *Vishnu Purana*  
 That originated from Brahma, Parikshit asked  
 The sage to go on, listening to which he hoped to find

A place in Vishnu's abode. Sage Shuka continued:

'It became evening, but the battle between  
Jayachandi and Bhaskar did not seem to come  
To an end. Unable to see anything in the dark,  
The soldiers were in confusion as to what to do.  
Taking advantage of the chaos, Chandis  
Caught them and ate up whoever they lay their  
Hands on. It was a bedlam in the battlefield  
With the noise of their revelry.  
As a part of the plan to eliminate  
Bhaskar, on a Tuesday, the eighth day of the bright  
Fortnight of Ashwin, Nimanjai swallowed the sun  
For nine days. It was during that period that Bhaskar  
Was put to death. At long last the Earth heaved  
A sigh of relief. With a conch in hand, she met  
Durga and bowed to her in respect.

Surprised at her dismal condition, Durga asked,  
"O Earth! What's the matter? Your face has  
An unhealthy pallor. Your *kumkum*-complexioned  
Body has turned as white as crystal. Your  
Ampleness has disappeared; you look so pale  
And worn out!" The Earth replied, "Mother!  
The fear of Mahisa and Shumbha and Nishumbha  
Has blanched me. When I see them, I hide myself  
In the netherworld. This unfortunate situation  
Has been continuing since Satya Yuga. It's all  
Too much to take in." Durga consoled her, saying,  
"Now that the demons are being killed, you needn't  
Be scared of them anymore. Your unhappy days  
Will come to an end very soon."

The Earth told her politely, "How can I be  
 Happy unless I devour Mahisa's flesh and blood?  
 Once that happens, I'll look ruddy again. It'll only  
 Be possible if you help me. When I'm in distress,  
 The righteous suffer from diseases. Those who  
 Admire me suffer, too. Those who walk on me  
 Hurt their feet. Everything grown on me becomes  
 Unwholesome. Those who take rest on me, die untimely.  
*Mantras* and medicine fail to heal the diseases.  
 Quarrels rise among the relatives of a family.  
 Such things happen when I'm made to suffer.  
 People fight among themselves and kill  
 Each other. Animals are killed indiscriminately.  
 Family relationship breaks off. I live  
 Only on the flesh and blood of the sheep and goats  
 That people offer to God for their recovery  
 From illness. Since the time the demons got  
 The boons, such calamities have been taking place.  
 It's true that the atrocities of the demons have  
 Declined, but it has not ended yet."

Durga replied, "The deluge takes place at your  
 Command. You share the sorrows and sufferings  
 Of all created beings, but enjoy nothing. Tell me,  
 What I can do for you. I'll try my best to see you  
 Happy and comfortable." The Earth begged her,  
 "O the greatest of all *yoginis*! I've been starving  
 For ages. Your *yoginis* eat the demons; they don't  
 Even allow a drop of their blood fall on the ground.  
 See that they don't do it any longer. Ask them  
 To leave the corpses for me to feed on, so that  
 My strength and lustre can be restored.

O Merciful mother! Do fulfil my wishes.”  
 When Durga advised her to watch the battle,  
 She said, “It’s of no use. I’ll be happy if I get  
 Enough to eat.” Being assured of it, she left.

Durga called out to Narayani, Baseli  
 And Bhagabati and told them, “Considering  
 The distress of the Earth, you hold off your  
 Hunger for the time being. From now on,  
 Let she devour the demons. One who violates  
 My order, will turn to a *dakini*. She’ll have no further  
 Birth and her life will rot in misery.” Then,  
 She instructed Dakeswari, “Inform everyone  
 That they shall not eat the corpses any longer.”  
 Dakeswari sounded out the message to everyone.

For a foolproof implementation of her  
 Order, Durga produced a number of *kshetrapalas*  
 From her feet, namely, Gorea, Khankhari, Ranka,  
 Kandia, Kamadeba, Jadua, Hanumanta, Ambika  
 And Bhalunka. In addition, she produced many  
 Others to keep an eye on the *yoginis*. They were  
 Jadumala, Hasanimala, Kandanimala, Ambua,  
 Khankara, Manika, Kalatunda, Babara, Bijaya,  
 Malla, Tuduka, Chamanda, Dahana, Shosana,  
 Sukuta and Jhanjhari. She deployed all of them  
 At various points of the battlefield. She instructed  
 Them, “Keep a watch on the *yoginis*. If you find  
 Anyone guilty, bring her to me.” The *kshetrapalas*,  
 A rope of cow hide in one of their hands  
 And an iron club in the other, moved  
 To their respective places.

Being forbidden to eat, the *yoginis* became  
 Too weak to fight with the demons  
 Who showed no signs of withdrawing  
 From the battle. The *yoginis* and the demons were  
 Fighting in pairs: Chandika with Kalaketu;  
 Baseli with Bajraketu; Tripura with Yojanabahu;  
 Bhadrakali with Birabahu; Bhairabi with Subahu;  
 Brahmayani with Chandabahu; Indrayani  
 With Dhankasura; Ugratara with Lotasura;  
 Kothari with Gaganaghoti; Barahi with  
 Andharaghara; Marakama with Urddhakesha;  
 Bhairabi with Chandrajita; Kalika with  
 Ghantasura; Yamayani with Bakasura;  
 Kamakshi with Trijatasura; Pingalakshi  
 With Unmatta; Tadaki with Birabara;  
 Dakeswari with Ghodamukha; Ambika with  
 Birupaksha; Maruti with Tarakshi; Baseli  
 With Gajamukha; Mahamaya with Bimalasura;  
 Chhaya with Pingalasura; Matangi with  
 Lohasura; Sri Chandi with Medhasura,  
 Ramachandi with Angirasura; and Chamanda  
 With Chirasura.

O Parikshit! As the sun lay hidden in  
 Nimanjai's stomach, it was dark all over.  
 Stabanai and Dulanai, the two sisters, were  
 Killing the demons and eating them. Likewise,  
 The seven sisters, namely, Bilai, Bichhalai,  
 Nila, Balai, Upai, Utkalai and Mangala were  
 Doing the same. When it came to the notice  
 Of the *kshetrapala*, he rushed to them, raising  
 His sword. He scolded them, "May your mouths



Be burnt. You, greedy women! How dare you  
 Act against the Goddess's will?" Paying no heed  
 To his words, they went on devouring  
 The demons' flesh. Infuriated, the *kshetrapala*  
 Struck one of them with his sword. In return,  
 She cut-off his hands. Bleeding all over,  
 The *kshetrapala* went to Durga and reported,  
 "O Mother of the Universe! I caught the seven  
 Sisters red-handed while eating the demons.  
 They severed my hands with the chopper." Enraged,  
 Durga cursed them, "The seven of you will be  
*Dakinis*. Leave the battlefield at once. You'll stay  
 Put on the banks of Baitarani as stone images  
 For four lakh years of Kali Yuga, with Patakeswar  
 As your husband. You'll be worshipped by  
 Men. They will sacrifice sheep and goats as  
 Offerings to you on which you will feed yourself.  
 Your sins will be redeemed by seeing  
 Krishna in form of a parrot every day."

O Noble ones! I'm too ignorant to write  
 It. I'm unlearned, a tiller of land using Balarama's  
 Weapon. I live in a non-descript village. I have  
 Not read the scriptures; I'm illiterate and I live  
 A despicable life. On the night of the tenth day  
 Of the bright fortnight of Ashwin, I saw a woman  
 In my dream who put a basil garland around  
 My neck and taught me the scriptures.  
 All that she told me that night will take  
 A year for me to put on record.  
 That omnipotent Goddess ordained me as  
 A poet. O Noble ones!

She is Saraswati, the cursed daughter  
 Of Krupajal, who has been worshipped  
 At Jankherpur in Bharata as a *yogini*.  
 May my mind remain steadfast at Sarala  
 Chandi's feet. May I spend my days  
 In writing the scripture.

Thus says Sudramuni Sarala Das.

x x x

King Parikshit told Shuka, 'O sage!  
 I'm eager to learn about Chandi in details.  
 You said the sun lay hidden in Nimanjai's  
 Belly. What did thirty-three crore gods do about  
 It?' To gratify his curiosity, Shuka began:

'Durga is the greatest of all goddesses  
 In all four Ages. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*  
 Are flooded with the tales of war. Many wars  
 Were also fought between the demons and Vishnu  
 During the periods of his incarnation. But  
 None of them is equal to those of Sri Chandika.  
 The display of her skill and fortitude  
 Is the rarest of the rare, which words fail to express.

Carrying out Durga's command, the *yoginis*  
 Gave up feeding on the demons. In a day,  
 The battlefield was full of dead bodies. An  
 Overflowing river of blood passed through it,  
 Submerging Vindhyagiri, one hundred eight  
*Yojanas* in length and two *yojanas* in circumference.  
 The *sal* tree atop the mountain sank under the waves

Of blood, heaps of corpses floating around it  
 And flocks of vultures drinking plenty of blood  
 Merrily. The terrain between Lakshmibhadra  
 And Saraswati rivers was completely inundated.  
 Crows and *sampadas* were pecking at the demons'  
 Flesh, while on flight.

In the absence of the sun, the three worlds  
 Were wrapped in darkness. The *yoginis* could  
 See the demons with their divine eyes, but it was  
 Too dark for the demons to distinguish between  
 The *yoginis* and the demons. For nine days  
 The sun did not rise. He, whose body is as vast  
 As the Meru mountain, had taken shelter in  
 Nimanjai's belly in a reduced form. At the time  
 The gods reached Durga and told her respectfully,  
 "It's for your blessing that we're now safe."  
 Durga interrupted, "You needn't be so complacent  
 About it. Don't forget that Mahisasura is  
 Still alive with a large number of his followers."  
 Brahma said, "The most formidable ones among  
 Them, such as Shumbha, Nishumbha, Bhaskar,  
 Have been slain by now. Chanda and Munda,  
 The conquerors of the three worlds,  
 Scared of whom, Indra had to quit his abode,  
 Have been destroyed. Now Nimanjai  
 Has to release the sun."

Hearing this, Nimanjai made her mouth  
 Wide open, through which the sun came out.  
 It became light everywhere. It surprised the gods  
 To see the river of blood. The Earth, extremely

Pleased, came to Durga with a conch in her hand.  
 Durga told her, "O Earth! You must be happy  
 Now. Your body is as radiant as gold  
 And you look nice and healthy. There is plenty  
 Of flesh and blood waiting for you. You can take  
 As much as you want. Now forget the past and be  
 Happy." The Earth replied, "Mother! By your grace  
 My hunger is satisfied. I don't need food anymore.  
 My former complexion has been restored.  
 Now feed your *yoginis* up. I'll be happy  
 To see them eating." Durga instructed  
 Narayani to communicate the news to others.

Listen, Parikshit! During the period  
 Of the sun's absence, a large number of demons  
 Were slain; their decomposed bodies were emitting  
 A foul smell. Calling out to the *yoginis*, Durga  
 Asked them to report on how many demons  
 Each of them had killed. With folded hands,  
 Narayani said she had killed five *kshaunis*  
 Soldiers of Jamaghanta; Brahmayani ninety  
 Thousand crore soldiers of Dhankasura;  
 Maheswari fifty-six crores of Kankasura;  
 Baseli thirty crores of Yojanabahu; Biraja  
 Three *sagaras* of Krutantaka; Dakeswari  
 One *padma*; Marakama three *sagaras*; Chandi  
 Seventy crores; Kalika one *sagara*; Kothari  
 Demons beyond count; Balama and Golama sisters  
 Two *kshaunis*; Ugratara one *mebaksha* soldiers  
 Of Subahu; Bhairabi three *brundas*; Indrakshi  
 Innumerable soldiers; Tripura five hundred;  
 Ambika nine *sagaras*; Matangi two hundred

Thirty crores; Bhagabati eighty lakhs; Maruchi  
 All the soldiers of Abalambana; Chamunda  
 Ten crores; Bhalunki countless; Kamala  
 One *sagara*; Barahi crores of soldiers of Jatasura;  
 Bhadrakali fifty crores; Betali twenty crores;  
 Ambika one *padma*; Kamakshi three *sagaras*;  
 Vindhyasuni a large number of demons;  
 Sankheswari four *kharbas*; Ananta one hundred  
*Padmas*; Bijaya five *sagaras*; and Mahamaya  
 Innumerable demon warriors.

Besides those, there were sixty-four *yoginis*;  
 Nine crore Katyayani; three crore Brahmayani;  
 Fifty-six crore Narayani; sixty-four crore  
 Indrayani; one *padma* Kamarupa; sixty lakh  
 Barunai; fifteen *mebaksha* Chandi;  
 All of whom were born to Durga  
 And as omnipotent as she was.

The Earth told Durga, "Mother! I know  
 Every incident that had occurred here since  
 The creation. I've witnessed the wars  
 Of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in  
 Which Vishnu had killed lakhs of demons.  
 But your battle is exceptional, many times  
 More violent than others. Pray, instruct  
 The *yoginis* to clear the battlefield of the bones,  
 Skin and flesh of the demons."

Pleased, Durga produced some more  
 Blood-thirsty goddesses from her feet, such as  
 Vindhyasuni, Ahantasuni, Jagulai, Bilasuni,

Kamasuni, Amasuni, Bamasuni, Surasuni,  
 Khemasuni, Jyesthasuni and Basudhyasuni.  
 All of them cried for food as soon as they were  
 Born. "Go and drink from the river of blood,"  
 Durga told them. Chandis, expanding  
 Their bodies to the size of mountains,  
 Began to consume the flesh and blood like  
 The Meru mountain swallowing Ganga when  
 She fell from heaven. The sixty-four *yoginis*  
 Drained the river of blood, sixty-four  
*Yojanas* deep. It took them a day and a night  
 To make the battlefield spotlessly clean.  
 Then, their eyes fell on the demons, who had  
 Survived the trauma of war. Not scared  
 Of their weapons, Bilasuni, Hathiasuni  
 And Brahmayani finished them off in no time.

Long ago there was a demon called  
 Japasura whom Brahma, pleased with his  
 Steadfast devotion, offered a boon. The demon  
 Said, "I wish to spend my life in meditation  
 And prayers. Bless me that I attain salvation."  
 Brahma advised him, "Go back to your place  
 And start meditating on the banks of Baitarani.  
 Whoever tries to break your meditation,  
 Will be burnt into ashes when you give  
 Him a sidelong look, be he Hari, Hara  
 Or Indra." Japasura attained *Siddhi*  
 In Satya Yuga. In course of time, he became  
 The king of the earth. He married his daughter,  
 Radhi, to Maya. They had a son, Bajrasingha  
 By name. Bajrasingha's son was Kapilasingha,

Who was Mahisasura's father. Therefore,  
Japasura was the great-grandfather  
Of Mahisasura, and later, his commander.  
He ruled South Koshala which was a land  
Of five crores of demons.

O Parikshit! Japasura enjoyed  
His life to the full, but his happy days came  
To an end when Hastibasini killed  
All his soldiers by collecting them into  
A fold with her trunk-like hands.  
Broken down to see his warriors dead,  
Japasura lost his vigour and was unable  
To lift his bow and weapons. He sat in  
Meditation on Kumandala mountain,  
Thinking on Brahma. While he was in  
Deep contemplation, Hastibasini pulled  
Him by her trunk-like hands and swallowed  
Him before he could defend himself.  
This is how Japasura and his twenty thousand  
Strong army were slain. All the wealth and fame  
Mahisasura had earned was due to Japasura's  
Spiritual powers. With his fall, Mahisasura  
Plunged into deep despair.

After the death of Japasura, the kingdom  
Suffered many setbacks. The demons gradually  
Lost their power; they became a race of weaklings.  
On the other hand, there were great rejoicings  
In heaven. Mahisa had already lost twenty-eight  
Commanders; none of whom could escape  
The clutches of twenty-eight yoginis. With

Crores of demons to feed on, the Earth was  
Bubbling over with excitement.

Seeing Mahisa's troops completely decimated,  
Kala and Bikala, who were hiding in a nearby  
Mountain, rushed to Mahisasura. They told  
Him, "O Lord! All your soldiers have been slain."  
Hearing this, Mahisa was so shocked that  
He was lost for words. The demons added,

"Twenty-eight of your commanders are  
Lying prostrate." Surprised, he asked, "Lying  
Prostrate? What do you mean? Who will  
Capture the woman, then?" Kala spoke out,  
"Your commanders are now no more." "O I'm  
Gone!" so saying Mahisa, slumped onto the ground,  
Unconscious. When he was brought round,  
He felt like a man who had lost everything.

Heaving deep sighs, he bemoaned,  
"At last Yama found access to my kingdom.  
Each of my commanders was capable enough  
Of conquering the three worlds on his own.  
All of them had to lay down their lives  
For the sake of a silly woman. I failed  
To realize that the gods had played a trick  
On me. O what a misfortune!" He began  
To sob. Kala asked him, "Didn't you know  
That no one can escape the strike of Vishnu's  
Wheel?" Mahisa explained, "After long years  
Of meditating on Brahma, I got the boon that  
No man could kill me. Andhaka, my minister,



Laughed it off. He cautioned me that the woman  
 Was one of Vishnu's incarnations. I scolded  
 Him harshly, saying that he was a stupid  
 Blind man. Had I listened to him earlier,  
 I wouldn't have fallen into such trouble.  
 The woman whom I disparage so much,  
 Has become a thorn in my flesh. O dear!  
 You departed, leaving me in the lurch!  
 It scares me to stay here. In which sea  
 Shall I hide myself? What's the use of staying  
 Alive after I've lost the best of my warriors?"

Cursing himself, he banged his head and fell  
 To the ground, as if struck by a thunderbolt.

Kalabimochana replied calmly, "While on  
 Their mission to serve your petty interest, they got killed.  
 I had told you how Chanda and Munda suffered  
 At her hands. Not heeding my warning, you dug  
 Your grave with your own hands. Now it's time  
 You proved your might to her. Your boastfulness  
 Led you to command Chanda and Munda to fetch  
 Her by the hair. This single order predicted  
 The impending doom you're now experiencing.  
 Now, no question of going back. Let's visit her  
 With our troops. Depending on the situation,  
 We'll decide whether to fight or draw a treaty."

Consenting to it, Mahisa ordered his troops  
 To get ready. He called out to Dhumralochana,  
 The charioteer, and asked him to be in readiness.  
 Dhumralochana decked the chariot, capable of  
 entering. The sun's abode  
 In gems, sapphire, ruby, pearl, silver, coral

And placed urns made of eight kinds of gems  
Atop it. He yoked nine thousand horses to the huge  
Chariot, each adorned with precious jewels.'

Parikshit intervened, 'O Learned sage!  
The chariot you just mentioned belonged to  
The sun. How did it come to Mahisasura?'  
Shuka replied, 'It's true the chariot belonged to  
The sun in which he used to travel across  
The sky. It used to take off from behind Udayagiri  
Every morning with seven horses hitched to it  
And driven by Aruna. It had a single wheel  
Made of the wood of the *sahada* tree. The sun  
Used to circle the Meru mountain every day.  
To mount an attack on the sun, Rahu was chasing  
Him in a flying chariot. On the full moon day  
Of the month of Margasira, both met each other.  
Frightened, the sun left his chariot and took  
Shelter in the Milky Sea. Not finding him, Rahu  
Swallowed his chariot and later, vomitted it  
Out on Ratnagiri mountain. Jambu, Rahu's  
Son, took it away. Killing Jambu, Indra carried  
It away to his abode. When Maya, Jambu's son,  
Empowered by Lord Shiva's boon, invaded  
Amaravati, Indra fled in fear. The demon grabbed  
All his wealth, including the chariot. Vishnu,  
Incarnated as Keshaba, killed Maya and Andhaka,  
His son was slain by Brahma. Andhaka's  
Sons, Raksha and Bhaksha, were slain by  
Krishna. Heti and Praheti, their sons,  
Oppressed the sages and brahmins and attacked  
Hiranyagarbhapura. In the battle that ensued

Between them and the sun, the latter conceded  
 Defeat to the demons. Thus the chariot was  
 Passed on to them. In his second incarnation,  
 Vishnu killed Heti and Praheti and transferred  
 The chariot to Yashobantipura. Bajranga  
 And Kalanala, their sons, defeated Yama  
 And took it away. Narayana killed him  
 And kept the chariot in the netherworld.

Kalanala's sons, Mali and Sumali, empowered  
 By the sun's boon, tortured the sages and brahmins,  
 For which Krishna slew him and offered  
 The chariot to Brahma. Demon Madhu, Malyabanta's  
 Son, with the blessing of Lord Shiva, launched  
 An attack on heaven, causing panic among  
 The gods who fled in fear. He kidnapped  
 Sixteen thousand *apsaras* and made a pleasure  
 Trip, carrying them in the chariot across the sky.  
 On the way, Vishnu killed Madhu and came to be  
 Called Madhusudana. He kept the *apsaras*  
 And the chariot in Barunapura. Jalataranga,  
 Madhu's son, receiving a boon from Lord Shiva,  
 Attacked Barunapura. Defeating Baruna,  
 He took away the chariot and Jalandhara's  
 Wife with him. Vishnu killed Jalataranga  
 And restored the chariot to heaven. Tadaka,  
 Jalataranga's son, invaded heaven  
 And the chariot came to his possession when  
 Indra fled in fear. Karttikeya killed Tadaka  
 And the brought the chariot to Alakapuri.  
 When Shumbha and Nishumbha occupied  
 Heaven, they took it away from there and presented

It to Mahisasura. O King! This is the story  
Of the long journey of the chariot before  
It came to be used by Mahisasura.'

Shuka's words are as indelible as letters  
On the stone; the sun and the moon are  
Witness to it. He is learned, noble and well versed  
In scriptures. He is omnipotent. His glory  
Is like the sands of Ganga, which cannot be  
Counted. He is always cheerful, not interested  
In worldly life.

O Goddess! Even Vyasa cannot  
Put your incredible deeds into words.  
Sudramuni Sarala Das prays to you  
For your blessings.

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## Mahisasura Proceeds to the Battlefield

‘Listen, Parikshit, to the heroic exploits  
Of Durga, who fulfils all human wishes.

Thinking on Brahma, Mahisasura sat  
In his chariot, and, with his followers and troops,  
Set out for the battlefield. The vast column  
Of the troops looked like another sea, their weapons  
Flashed like meteors in the dark sky. Kalabimochana  
Was leading from the front with ten thousand warriors  
And nine *sagara* soldiers. At Mahisasura’s right  
Was Singhanada who had, besides elephants  
And horses, two lakh warriors and five *marbhuta*  
Soldiers. Dundubhi was at his right, leading  
Four crore warriors, two *sagara* soldiers  
And one crore demons; Singhamukha and Gomukha,  
The two commanders, were in the rear with eight  
Lakh warriors. Mahisasura himself was accompanied  
By eleven crore five *marbhuta* sixty-eight lakh

Soldiers who had just returned after eleven days  
 Of war. Crores of attendants were at his service,  
 Fanning him with black *chamars* and white  
*Chamars*, their handles studded with pearls.  
 Some were raising umbrellas of peacock feathers,  
 Others holding umbrellas with silken covers.  
 Three lakh eight thousand musicians were  
 Playing sixty-five thousand trumpets and an  
 Equal number of drums and five thousand  
*Tamakas*. Three crore eight thousand warriors  
 Were riding bears and tigers. They were dark  
 In complexion, dressed in black and putting on  
 Armours. They looked like the clouds of Shravana.  
 They had waist-belts studded with gems  
 That looked like storks in flight against  
 The background of sable clouds.

They were on their march to Ratnagiri;  
 The earth shook under the weight of their feet.  
 Ambika informed Durga, "Mahisasura is  
 Arriving here to wage a war against us.  
 Hearing the news, Chandis, long starving,  
 Are excited with the prospect of having plenty  
 Of food. They're only waiting for your orders.'  
 The Earth, sweating all over, told the Goddess,  
 "Mother! I can't bear the wickedness of the demons  
 Any longer. This time my sorrow has been doubled.  
 Look, how I bleed!" Durga consoled her,  
 "Bear with it for a day; you'll be relieved  
 Of your sorrow by tomorrow." So saying,  
 She created from her body crores  
 Of goddesses, each a Mohini.'

Parikshit interrupted, 'I'm eager  
To hear their names, of what complexion they  
Were and how they looked like. That'll  
Redeem my sins.'

Shuka said, 'Listen carefully. Narmada  
Sarasvati was the first to come, next came  
Sarala Chandi. The goddesses who followed  
Them were as follows:

Ambika, Baulai, Shanti, Kanti, Madhabi,  
Ukhulai, Dhyai, Rukhai, Rakhai, Abatarika,  
Madhu, Tarali, Bikala, Jaloka, Drami, Sami,  
Uttama, Palai, Biranai, Birangamali, Pingalai,  
Sadai, Bidai, Kaparai, Tanai, Dhamanti,  
Sumanti, Hathi, Hingalai, Jetai, Matai,  
Anantai, Bijaya, Kalandi, Tulasa, Abhaya,  
Andhari, Sramuki, Saria, Bipula, Ganga,  
Jamuna, Mekhala, Mahakhala, Japa, Jupai,  
Manani, Chandrarekha, Marua, Maarua,  
Gopalika, Madanika, Sumati, Nidrabati,  
Pingala, Arukha, Suradha, Mahijata, Taraki,  
Debi, Abala, Priyamati, Kala, Kamala, Saenta,  
Dharamai, Jamai, Dankini, Bhayankari,  
Chitrapada, Garakhi, Sadarakhi, Banadebati,  
Dhabali, Mauli, Kuruli, Parekha, Surasiddha,  
Mahajita, Areka Darsani, Surasuri, Udaundi,  
Apurna, Sanchai, Binjhai, Mahani, Sanikali,  
Mukali, Dandi, Prachandi, Bikarali, Bira,  
Bitakshi, Bikuchhi, Bimati, Bhanumati,  
Parikshi, Dhanumati, Rebati, Girija, Singhari,  
Binghari, Bhangari, Sauhala, Tanuja, Sakembari,

Bankeswari, Jajati, Malati, Basi, Subasi,  
 Jashobanti, Aramai, Jemai, Angirai, Amai,  
 Anandai, Murai, Chingarai, Binai, Bipakshi,  
 Indrakshi, Jalarodri, Parvati, Uma, Upama,  
 Basani, Malabati, Chandasuri, Birasuri,  
 Sunyasari and many others. They were  
 Of five complexions: white, yellow, red,  
 Dark and fair. Those who chant their names  
 Are blessed with salvation and all their  
 Fear is redeemed. These goddesses are  
 Enchantresses who lure the wicked into  
 Their destruction.'

Thus says Sudramuni Sarala Das,  
 The author, praying at the lotus-feet  
 Of these goddesses.



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## The Killing of Kalabimochana

Shuka continued:

‘Listen, O King! The goddesses I just mentioned  
Are protectors of mankind. Each excelling the other  
In beauty, they enchant the three worlds  
And create in all living beings a will to live.  
They have no beginning nor end, but only the middle.  
They encompass the world with *maya*, which tempts  
Even sages, brahmins and hermits  
Fall victims to it. They punish the proud and rob  
And defeat the wicked ones. They spend their time  
Merrily, in singing and dancing. They do things  
At will. They play various roles in the lives of men.  
As mothers they give birth to them; as wives attend  
To their sexual needs in their youth; as Kalika  
Take care of them when they are old, and as fire,  
Cremate them when they die. They create; they destroy.

Addressing the assembly of those goddesses,  
Durga said, “Look! The tyranny of the demons

Has been too excruciating for the Earth to bear with.  
Now I ask you to bewitch the demons, except,  
Mahisasura, by seductions and kill them.”  
Receiving the orders, the Vaishnavas changed themselves  
Into beautiful young women and entered  
The battlefield. There was a heavy gathering  
Of the demon soldiers who were making an awful din.  
Seeing the women with glossy appearances before  
Them, their cry froze on their lips, it was like  
Garuda, King of birds, falling onto the ground  
Helplessly. Enchanted by their bearuty, the demons  
Threw away their weapons and alighted from  
Their chariots. Lethally wounded by Madana’s  
Arrows, they cried out, “Dear oh dear! Save us!”  
Lost in the ocean of lust, each of them caught  
Hold of a woman of his choice. Sporting  
His moustache and prancing, one of them said,  
“No one can have the company of such a harlot  
Unless he took a dip in Prayaga or pleased  
Lord Shiva by his devotion. For this woman,  
I’m ready to forsake my family and lay down  
My life, if necessary.”

Seeing his soldiers enticed by the women,  
Mahisasura was puzzled. He thought: It is for  
These women that I have lost many of my warriors.  
They failed to overcome their sensual desires  
And fell victims to the women who tricked them  
Into killing themselves. The charms of a woman  
Can reduce the mightiest to the weakest.  
Her sidelong look can raise the mountain above  
The ground. The charms of her eyes can make

A stone crack." Mahisa shouted at his soldiers,  
 "Enjoy your time with the women as best as  
 You can." At this, each of the demons picked  
 A woman and, tugging on her hands, hurried along  
 To the forest, hand in hand. It was spring.  
 They had a lot of fun there, and, when  
 The night came, they revelled in drinking  
 And making amorous advances to each other.

The Earth informed Durga, "Mother!  
 All have left Mahisasura except Sindhu,  
 Upasindhu, Kalabimochana, Kala, Bikala  
 And Dhumralochana. In obedience to your command,  
 No woman has tried to cast her spell on Mahisasura."

It became morning. The warriors did not  
 Return. Curious to find out the reason for their  
 Delay, he proceeded to the forest riding a tiger,  
 With a gem-studded club in hand and flanked  
 By his followers. At the far end of the forest,  
 On the south bank of Lakshmibhadra,  
 He discovered all his warriors lying dead,  
 Their bodies mutilated. Dumbstruck, he now  
 Realized what might have happened to them.  
 His head began to reel. He fell off his chariot  
 And passed out. When he was brought round,  
 He held the dead bodies dearly and bemoaned,  
 "How shameless I'm that I'm still alive!" He cursed  
 Himself and muttered, "O dear ones! How sad,  
 You invited trouble upon yourself! I'd never seen  
 Such an act of deceit in my life. Hell with me!  
 I'll surely kill myself by fire." Moved by the king's

Distress, Kalabimochana, boiling mad, rushed  
 To Durga. Seeing him, the Goddess, her face like  
 The Autumn moon, advanced towards him.  
 At the time the enchantresses reached there, each  
 With a lotus in her hand. Kalabimochana was  
 Now sure that they were the ones who killed the demons  
 Last night. He left his chariot and weapons  
 Behind and ran towards them, seeking revenge.

Kalabimochana, Trijatasura's grandson,  
 Hooked his arms around sixty-five of them,  
 And, holding them by the feet, hurled them  
 Southwards. All of them fell on Rakta island,  
 Unconscious. They were Ananta, Bijaya, Tarini,  
 Kamakshi, Biralī, Karali, Matangi, Tarakshi,  
 Shama, Subama, Kalikali, Basi, Brusali, Atagni,  
 Maruti, Sukeshi, Sita, Saenta, Malati, Muktabeni,  
 Chakra, Chandrabati, Nairuta, Prasani, Mati,  
 Saradha, Bimalai, Krutangi, Sasthagni, Tanuai,  
 Tanu, Bhanu, Medha, Sumedha, Hira, Prava, Radha,  
 Suradha, Lalita, Sulita, Suprarekha, Sarana,  
 Sashimukhi, Baseli, Chandrarekha, Indrai,  
 Chandrai, Bindai, Bhotai, Sarua, Parua, Sadangi,  
 Motai, Uhhuri, Chhaladuruni, Bikatali, Bhutai,  
 Atutai, Kapali, Katali, etc. Then he grabbed  
 Athousand of them, whom of them were:  
 Sankuni, Sauni, Dhatakataka, Parabati, Kami,  
 Bhami, Bisaadaki, Utkati, Asita, Damita, Kalika,  
 Jalini, Satamugru, Kampi, Kamika, Adrabali,  
 Rekhi, Surekhi, Namami, Natakuta, Chandi,  
 Chamuni, Badarika, Madhabi, Sadhabi, Tara,  
 Suta, Hara, Dekhi, Amua, Mula, Bikara, Gabanag,

Dustai, Maratanda, Biraha, Bidhata, Kalaghanta,  
 Prachanda, Tanuki, Januki, Priya, Kalandi, Dhama,  
 Saurama, Dhamsi, Kista, Mukundi, Chamari,  
 Maitri, Bisnubhadra, Dhumaisita, Bhadrata,  
 Adangi, Bimalai, Marajita, Jigna, Jaitri and Kantani.  
 All those fell on Shuka island. Next, he caught  
 Some more and threw them one lakh *kosha* away  
 To fall on Singhala island. Nine thousand goddesses  
 He spun in air and sent them to Bilanka  
 Kingdom. Then, he collected another nine thousand  
 Chandis and hurled them northwards, who fell  
 In Jambu island. Some of them were: Loka,  
 Ambika, Poloka, Suni, Abhaye, Birupa, Hastibasini,  
 Nila, Matiminja, Sarupa, Bruksalsi, Kamari,  
 Kamakshi, Tarakshi, Baulai, Mekhala, Upala,  
 Kokila, Bikala, Sathi, Duchhai, Leutsi, Kamala,  
 Atari, Sukhari, Chakitai, Aurai, Jageni, Jageswari,  
 Champai, Rupai, Sananta, Binanta, Kendukai,  
 Rajai, Panchasini, Sitasini, Kankai, Budhai,  
 Pandai, Gandai, Mati, Prasana, Hingula, Kashi,  
 Dhabalangi, Maruchi, Pingala, Januki, Tanuki,  
 Jugani, Jatika, Dursarupa, Arupa, Saunika,  
 Katika, Parbata, Lagika, Lotasani, Abasani,  
 Dakeswari, Bhulunka, Khankheni, Kankani,  
 Satasani, Priya, Narmada, Pitasani, Madakhala,  
 Janita, Bhogeswari, Sumati, Chandrabati,  
 Ghorarupa, Bhutarai, Dakhina, Mahirupa, Sati,  
 Sabitri, Rati, Damati, Jagati, Sachala, Sampadi,  
 Bhanumati, Jita, Jarata, Kripa, Batchhala,  
 Sada, Alali and Haria. All those goddesses  
 Stayed in Jambu island and lived on human  
 Beings after seducing them. Thus, Kalabimochana

Threw the goddesses to the seven islands, severely  
Injured. Some of them had their faces covered  
With cuts and bruises; others had their bones  
Broken, still others had their limbs dislocated.  
Unable to move, they lay where they fell.

Mahisasura heard about all this from Kalinjan.  
But that was not the end of Kalabimochana's  
Actions. He captured about one thousand goddesses  
And tossed them into the air randomly. They fell  
In the forest and were later known as forest  
Deities, bearing the name, Kamakshi. Three thousand  
Goddesses he threw into water who came to be known  
As water goddesses. The names of some of them were:  
Malaya, Basanta, Chiregati, Tilalochana, Dumata,  
Malika, Bhabisa, Madana, Gokula, Palagni, Abhuta,  
Sanghita, Panthara, Madagni, Basini, Satima,  
Marita, Rasita, Sataini, Trijata, Trikuta, Nagari,  
Baula, Tila, Tejya, Santani and Pingala. This is  
How Kalabimochana wiped out the whole lot  
Of goddesses to avenge the death of the fellow demons.

When he met Mahisasura, the king greeted him  
With a reward of gold and gems. Addressing him  
As the saviour of his life, he said, "You're a great  
Kshatriya who saved Rahu's clan from peril.  
I'm the cause of my present misery. Why didn't  
I ordain you as commander before? You're  
The only answer to the problems of the demon  
Community. It was stupid of me to let my innocent  
Warriors die helplessly. Now you're the only one  
On whom I rely. You've wiped out all the *yoginis*

Single-handedly. You're the greatest of all the warriors  
 In the five kingdoms. You're the saviour of a great  
 Dynasty. I ordain you the king of the netherworld  
 And heaven. I've just one request to make:  
 Get me the stupid woman." With folded hands,  
 Kalabimochana replied, "Be assured that she'll be  
 Brought to you very soon. Long live the king  
 Of the three worlds! If I fail to do it, I won't  
 Return to you alive."

With fierce determination, that demon  
 Proceeded to Ratnagiri to fetch the woman,  
 The root of all evils. He did not take the chariot,  
 Nor his men. The only things he carried with  
 Him were a pair of wieldy maces. By the time  
 He reached there, Goddess Durga was sitting  
 On the summit of Ratnagiri alone; the nine  
 Crores of Katayanis were deployed in the sky  
 To take on the demons. Like Rahu encircling  
 The sun, Kalabimochana's body, as huge as the Mandara  
 Mountain, seemed to girdle the Goddess. Brandishing  
 His maces and biting his lips in anger, he asked her,  
 "Hey, strange woman! Where do you come from?  
 Why do you invite your death unnecessarily?  
 Mahisasura is the monarch of the three worlds.  
 Be his wife and enjoy your life to the lees. If  
 You agree, I'll offer you to him. This is the only  
 Way to save your life." Hearing his words,  
 She replied with a smile, "I find you're not in  
 The king's favour, or else, you wouldn't  
 Have spoken such harsh words to me. If you can  
 Bring him to me, I'll believe that he trusts you."

The demon scowled at her and roared out,  
 “A despicable woman as you are, how dare you  
 Ask King Mahisasura to come to you? When  
 He walks, Indra, Shiva, Brahma and Hari begin  
 To tremble. If you don’t do as I say, I’ll take  
 You forcibly to him, the same way as Panchali  
 Was taken to the royal court.”

Reaching the end of her patience, the Goddess  
 Called out “O Ugratara! O Baseli! O Narayani!”  
 Suddenly lakhs of Katyayanis positioned  
 In the sky descended on the earth, their feet  
 In the netherworld and heads touching the sky.  
 They were armed with the *kodanda*, *gandiba* and maces.  
 Letting out a cry “Kill! Kill!” Narayani charged at  
 Kalabimochana with her mace, Bhairabi with  
 A trident and Baseli with a cutlass. Tripura  
 Trapped the demon in cobra snare, Ugratara beat  
 Him with thunder, Narayani shot at him a *brahmasara*,  
 Indrayani pierced a trident into his body, Chamunda  
 Hit him with a mace and Marakama struck him  
 With a sword that chopped off his head.

O Parikshit! Three *padmas* of Chandis  
 Arrived there to devour the demon’s flesh  
 And blood which was less than enough. Seeing  
 Kalabimochana falling dead, the gods strew gold  
 From the sky. They held a meeting on the Meru  
 Mountain after a gap of one lakh and sixty-seven  
 Years. There was great rejoicing in heaven, Narada  
 Singing songs in seven tunes and asking  
 The *gandharvas* to send for the spring.’



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## The Killing of Mahisasura

'Too shocked at the news of Kalabimochana's  
Death at the hands of the women in the battle,  
King Mahisasura fell off his throne with a thud  
And passed out. Demon Dhumralochana took  
Him into his lap and brought him round,  
Sprinkling some water on his face. Regaining  
Consciousness, the king cursed himself  
And bemoaned, "What a damn shame! How I wish  
I died long before! Do I live to see all these?  
O my dear friend, Kalabimochana, the Rising  
Moon of the full moon day in my Jenabati city!  
The void left by your death can never be filled:  
I guess my days are numbered. Even if  
I live, how shall I rule the kingdom, having none  
To assist me? O Dhumralochana, Sindhu  
And Upasindhu! I advise the three of you to leave  
The place and save your lives before it is too  
Late. This time I'll fight single-handedly, giving up  
My lust for wealth and power and fear of death.

I'd so many great warriors and wise men  
Who could foresee the past and future, but  
None of them spoke a word about what was  
Going to happen. I defeated the gods and demons  
With my might. It is my bad luck that I end up  
Losing everything. No one ever hinted me  
About the villainy of the gods. Being carried away  
By the boastful words of my commanders,  
I failed to take necessary precautions on time.  
At last my fate betrayed me. All my commanders  
Died before my very eyes, letting me live a shameless  
Life." As a kshatriya it was all too much for  
Him to take in. Between sobs, he continued,  
"When all that I was proud of is lost, I don't  
Mind whether I win or lose or whoever defeats me.  
Infatuated with a wicked, despicable woman,  
They gambled away their lives.  
I had many and she had none.  
How could she, a mere woman, be not afraid of  
Men? Alas! Vishnu is my only adversary.  
I would have been happy if he had killed me.  
On the other hand, if I had defeated him, I would  
Have been praised in the three worlds. Had I  
Earlier wished to be killed by man, I would have  
Earned the virtue of being killed by Vishnu's wheel.  
Now I'm on the brink of death. I'm going to die  
For no fault of mine, but because of the gods'  
Conspiracy." So saying, the king of the demons  
Struck the Dhabala mountain with his sword.  
O Parikshit! That nine-*yojana*-long mountain,  
Crumbled, cut into half, that scared the gods.  
Waving his sword, he rushed to heaven, yelling,

“I’ll kill all the gods today. I’ll wring Brahma’s  
 Head and spare no one.” Seeing Mahisasura  
 Ascending the sky, the gods left their abode  
 And fired arrows at the sky incessantly  
 That formed a wall, eight thousand *yojanas*  
 Long and nine hundred *yojanas* thick.  
 Unable to penetrate into the sky, Mahisasura  
 Asked Andhaka, his minister, “Now that the way  
 To heaven is blocked, what should we do now?”  
 Andhaka replied, “In spite of warning you many  
 Times, you still keep saying that she is a woman.  
 You don’t believe her to be the incarnation  
 Of Vishnu. Don’t you see she is holding conch,  
 Wheel, mace and the *gandiba* bow in her  
 Hands.” Mahisasura looked at her and was  
 Surprised to notice the signs of Vishnu on her.

When the day was done, he returned  
 From the sky. After ablutions, he meditated  
 On his father and changed himself into  
 A buffalo, of the size of a mountain.  
 At the time Durga and the *yoginis* were passing  
 Their time in revelry, all of them inebriated.  
 The mighty demon, disguised as a buffalo,  
 Began uprooting Ratnagiri mountain  
 With his horns. One hundred *yojanas* of it  
 Was inside the earth. It was two *yojanas* long  
 And two hundred *yojanas* and five hundred  
 Fingers high. He held Ratnagiri on his horns  
 After uprooting it, on which seven *padmas*  
 Fifteen *mebaksha* crores of *yoginis* were  
 Frolicking. Panicked, Marakama, informed

Durga, "Mahisasura has arrived here in  
The darkness." All the goddesses raised a cry  
When Mahisasura hurled Ratnagiri nine  
Thousand *yojanas* away, to a place called  
Marahattaka on the borders of the Skanda forest,  
In south Saurashtra.'

Glory to Katyayani, the greatest of *yoginis*,  
Who feeds on flesh and liquor, the Protector  
Of mankind, the Remover of obstacles,  
The Destroyer of the wicked, the Well-wisher  
Of the three worlds and the Saviour of the world.  
How can I narrate your glory who Brahma  
Worships? I bow to her hundreds and thousands  
Of times, says Sudramuni Sarala Das  
With greatest respect.

x x x

'Listen, O King, to the *Vishnu Purana*  
To know more about what happened next.

By the time Mahisasura uprooted Ratnagiri  
And threw it away, it was midnight already.  
Dhrumalochana told him, "Let's go back.  
It is not desirable to stay on at the place  
You've just conquered." Appreciating what  
Mahidas's grandson had said, the king of the demons  
Journeyed back to the palace. After his bath  
And meal, he retired to his bed.

Having lost Ratnagiri to Mahisasura  
The goddesses sheltered on the summit of Vindhya giri.

Sorry to see Durga moving in the sky as a homeless  
 Wanderer, Indra brought her a *khechari*  
 Chariot and requested her to use it. She took  
 Her seat in the chariot, Sanchaketu by name,  
 And, in the blink of an eye, she travelled  
 Over the seven islands and the whole universe.  
 The Creator offered her valuable gifts as  
 A sign of gratitude.'

Sage Shuka said, 'O King! Mahisasura  
 Was busy consulting Dhumralochana.  
 Impatient, he could not stay seated at one  
 Place. He was beating his arms and saying  
 Regretfully, "Why I didn't I fight the battle  
 Earlier? It was my misfortune that such  
 An idea didn't occur to me. I missed  
 The chance of killing the women with my own  
 Hands, and, unfortunately, got my friends  
 Killed, instead."

It became morning. The sound of conches  
 Filled the air. Leaving bed, Mahisa got up angrily,  
 A mace in his hand. After ablutions, he said  
 His prayers to Brahma and changed himself into  
 A fierce lion of enormous size that covered  
 The earth, as clouds cover the sky. He reached  
 Subarnachuda mountain, the present abode of Durga.  
 Panicked, the other goddesses left their carriers  
 And began to run. Durga consoled them, "Don't  
 Be scared. I'll kill Mahisasura now and fulfil  
 The promise I'd made to the gods."

Asking them to wait and see, she changed  
Herself into a lion, of the size of Vindhya giri.  
And flew into the sky. When Durga and Mahisasura  
Met each other, it looked like the Meru and the Mandara  
Mountains placed close to each other. The earth  
Shone with the radiance of both the lions.  
They banged their heads against each other  
Which rocked the earth and deafened the three worlds.  
They scratched each other with their claws;  
The blood flowing from the wounds they had  
Received looked like the rising moon. Their mouths  
Hanging open seemed to swallow the three worlds.  
The gods, in fear, fled their abode. Their feet  
Covered the netherworld and heaven, their ears  
Looked as big as the universe. Their bodies were  
Impenetrable and their chests looked like  
Mountains made of iron. When they breathed out,  
The world seemed to flutter; the noise was like  
That of a thunder cloud. The push of their  
Bodies emitted a huge fire that seemed  
To burn down the Creation. The battle continued  
Throughout the day and the night, the moon  
And the sun hiding themselves in the sea.  
There was no day, no night, no sun, no moon.  
The radiance of their bodies was the only  
Source of light. The nine kingdoms comprising  
The earth shook in fear. In absence of air,  
All living beings lay lifeless. At the time  
Goddess Durga pounced on Mahisasura's  
Chest and tried to tear it with her claws,  
Teeth and in many other ways, but it was all

In vain. Having failed in her attempt to hurt Him, she sat where she was and told him, "I must thank you, O Mahisasura, for your Unflinching devotion to Brahma who was Pleased to give you a boon that made your Body as stiff as thunder. I'm surprised, You look exactly like the lion I use as My carrier." So saying, the merciful Goddess Let go of him.

Leaving the battle, Mahisasura, scurried away. Completely worn out. As the sun rose, his Disguise fell off and he returned to his former Self. When he entered the palace, his queens, Kali And Karali, came out to welcome him. Broken down With shame and exertion, he had no followers with Him to whom he could confide the details. Sorry To find him in a deplorable state, his queens suggested, "Let's go and surrender to the woman without A second thought. Tying an axe around our necks And a straw between our teeth, we'll beg her for Forgiveness." Feeling a bit relieved, he sat calmly. In an attempt to ease his agony, He carried on a dialogue with himself, "If I take the path of righteousness And beg pardon of her, it will be an insult to The demon clan. As far as I know she is a ruthless Woman. I don't expect kindness from her at all. A woman is the most stupid of all living beings. How can she behave respectfully? I'm sure she'll Never forgive me and spare my life, either. What shall I gain by sitting idle, doing nothing?

That'll be disgrace to the demon community."  
While he was brooding over those thoughts, Sindhu  
And Upasindhu reached there.

With bears as their carriers and ten lakh soldiers  
At their command, they were the commanders  
Of Mahisasura, stationed at Yojanagiri.  
The *chandals*, who used to guard the city at night,  
Heard the king's wailing while travelling through  
The city. Puzzled, they met the king, and, with  
Consolatory words, tried to comfort him. Being  
Heavily drunk, they forgot how and what to speak  
To the king. Sindhu and Upasindhu reached the king  
Soon after, and, with due respect, told him,  
"Why do you worry when we're there to protect  
You? You've taken care of so long. If we don't  
Stand by you now, of what use are we, then?  
O Lord! We take the vow that we'll kill the women  
And leave no trace of them." Happy to hear this,  
Mahisasura felt that all was not lost, there was  
Still a ray of hope for him. He offered them  
Finery, plenty of gems and ornaments.  
He addressed them as benignly as a slave would  
Do, "My sons! If you save my clan, which is  
Now under the threat of extinction, your fame  
Will spread throughout the ages." Moved by the king's  
Words, the commanders proceeded southwards  
With their troops, among the sound of the marching  
Band. Having one leg and eight hands each,  
They were armed with mace, *konta* and sword.  
With two lakh soldiers, Dhakasura marched  
To Ratnagiri; Bhaksha was dispatched to Vindhya giri



With two lakh soldiers, and Sindhu, with the rest  
Of soldiers, kept guard over the area to  
The south of the mountain.

Feeling a surge of danger,  
The Goddess asked Chandramukhi to go with  
Four lakh *betalas* to check the number of the demons  
And to find out if Mahisasura was present among  
Them. The *betali*, standing on the summit of  
The mountain, cast her eyes around. Returning,  
She reported that Mahisasura was not there,  
And that Sindhu and Upasindhu, the commanders  
In charge of the city, were leading the troops. Hearing  
This, the Goddess called Kothari, Ugratara, Kola Ambika,  
Nimanjai and Tripura and told them, "The five of you  
Battle with the demons and finish them off." With  
Swords in hands, they flew into the sky. Seeing  
The vast army, looking like the sea, they were scared,  
Like snakes facing Garuda. They raised a war  
Cry that deafened the world. The battle broke out,  
The demons firing arrows at them incessantly.  
But their arrows were burnt into ashes by the fire  
From the eyes of the goddesses. They knifed into  
The battlefield, and, groping among the demons,  
They tore the bodies of many warriors into shreds.  
They pulled their ears. They wrung the necks  
Of many of the demons and made their heads  
Into a garland. They wore it around their necks  
And went wild. The demons continued hitting  
Their heads with maces again and again,  
But their weapons were destroyed as grass by  
Fire. With no weapons, the demons started landing

Blows and slaps on the goddesses. But how could  
They harm them with their hands when their weapons  
Failed to do so? The red-looking goddesses, dancing, pushed  
Their mouths into the wounds of the demons went on  
Drinking their blood. Holding them by the legs, they  
Tossed them into the air and swallowed them as they  
Fell. Stark naked, they sang, danced and ululated  
While devouring the demons. Too mysterious were  
Their ways to be explained.'

Those who listen to the story of Chandi's war  
Face no hardship in their lives. It is both entertaining  
And educative. I bow to Durga who fulfils all  
The wishes and blesses her devotees with wealth  
And children. Most gratefully, I bow at her  
Lotus-feet hundred and thousands of times,  
Says Sudramuni Sarala Das.

x x x

Abhimanyu's son told the sage, 'The four  
Ideals that constitute a righteous life are  
*Dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. You're Brahman,  
You only can show me the path to righteousness.  
The sins I committed, knowingly or unknowingly,  
Are washed away by the river of your words which  
Are no less than nectar. O Sage!  
Now tell me about how Mahisasura was killed.'  
Shuka explained:

'The ten lakh warriors engaged in the battle  
With the goddesses were at last killed and devoured.  
The goddesses chopped their bodies with swords

And arrows and ate their bones and flesh. Seeing  
Sindhu and Upasindhu, Durga, in anger, rushed  
Towards them, but was prevented by Ugratara  
And Tripura from proceeding further. They  
Volunteered to take on the demons themselves.  
They moved forward to the demon commanders,  
Seated in chariots to which four thousand  
Donkeys were yoked. They opened their mouths,  
The upper lip raised to the height of the mountain  
And the lower lip touching the earth. They swallowed  
The chariots, each measuring an area of nine  
Thousand hands. Leaving the chariots, Sindhu  
And Upasindhu hurried to the goddesses  
And struck their heads with their maces, as  
Huge as mountains. But, instead of causing  
Any harm to the goddesses, the maces were crushed  
To powder. Ugratara chopped their heads off  
With a cutlass, but as soon as their heads  
Fell off, new heads sprung from their trunks.  
Rising to their feet, the demons launched an  
Assault on the goddesses again, who cut-off  
Their heads as before, which were soon replaced.  
The goddesses were in a fix when Chetani,  
A Goddess, appeared before them and said,  
“Don’t be brittle. These demons are  
The grandsons of Japasura, a great yogi,  
Who is now meditating on the Ranastambha  
Mountain. He worships Wind-god, offering  
Him food every day. While in meditation,  
Japasura sits, stretching his hands forward,  
Whatever falls on his hands, he eats it up.  
O Ugratara! You can eliminate them only if

You do as I say. Collect Lord Shiva's trident,  
Brahma's arrow and Indra's thunder.  
Shoot them from the *ajagaba* bow at the demons.  
The arrows will fly them to Japasura, who'll  
Swallow them immediately. Aim the trident  
At their navels, thunder at their chest  
And Brahma's arrow at their throats.  
This is the secret of their death."

Tripura and Ugratara prayed to  
Brahma, Shiva and Indra who offered  
Them the arrow, the trident and the thunder.  
When Ugratara fitted the weapons to the *ajagaba*  
Bow, the Sun, terrified, left the sky. The Earth,  
The Water, the Fire, the Wind and the Sky froze  
In fear. Suddenly the voice of Providence was heard  
From above: "O Mother! Take care that  
The weapons hit the demons and not fall on  
The earth, which may be disastrous for the creation."  
Taking all precautions, the Goddess fired  
The weapons at the demons which pierced into  
Their bodies and flew them into Japasura's  
Hands. Japasura, faint with hunger, swallowed  
Them instantly. That's how the lives of Sindhu  
And Upasindhu came to an end. The gods  
In heaven rejoiced at their death.'

Glory to Tripura,  
The story of whose heroic deeds is endless!  
When Brahma fails to explain her greatness,  
How can I, being a man, do it?  
By pleasing her, one can be redeemed

Of one's fear of death.

Sudramuni Sarala Das prays at her lotus-feet.

x x x

'Too shocked to hear that Sindhu and Upasindhu  
Are now no more, Mahisasura broke down. Remembering  
All that had happened in the recent past, he bewailed,  
"Of what use is my life now? I'll surely take poison  
And die. I'd one hundred *padmas* of warriors, the most  
Formidable on the earth and in the netherworld.  
I'd one crore *kshaunis* of foot soldiers. All had  
Lost their lives in the fourteen-day battle. Now  
There is no trace of any of them who once ruled  
The whole world. How many of my great friends  
Didn't I lose in the battle! What is left for me  
To do in this world? Surely, I'll lay down my life  
In today's battle. As long as my sinful soul exists,  
My worry would keep growing day by day. If I'm  
Fated to die one day, why not today?" Coming  
Out of the palace, he commanded Dhumralochana  
To get the chariot ready. Dhumralochana  
Fitted the Sanchaketu chariot with precious  
Jewels which Mahisa had plundered from heaven.  
That beautiful chariot needed no carriers  
And it flew at the whim of the charioteer.

Mahisasura adorned himself with  
The Biraketana crown studded with diamond  
And emerald; beads of diamonds and gems  
Hanging from it covered his forehead. He wore  
Earrings of gems and pearls that hung over  
His cheeks. He put on four rounds of a necklace

Around his neck, armlets and bracelets studded  
With gems and diamonds, rings made of  
Eight kinds of gems on his fingers and bejewelled  
Anklets. He held a bow with clusters of gems  
And pearls fitted to its ends and golden bells  
Hanging from it. It was a rare bow, Kushaketu  
By name, offered to him by Brahma after  
His conquest of heaven. That bow, which looked  
More beautiful than the Mekhalagiri, he held  
In his left hand. He filled the quiver with  
Five crore arrows made of Jatayu's wings  
And studded with gems. He stowed one thousand  
*Guruja* and five thousand swords in the chariot.  
Finally he put on the armour. All this made him  
Look like the rising sun.

O Parikshit! When the monarch  
Of the world got into the chariot, the sky  
Turned grey; hot wind blew from the north  
And the earth felt like burning. It was  
The eighth day of the bright fortnight of Ashwin,  
On which the stars were all placed, which was  
An inauspicious sign for a journey to the south.  
Dhumralochana drove the chariot southwards,  
With the king, looking like a livid flame, inside.  
The chariot flew at the speed of the wind;  
In a few moments it reached Ratnagiri.  
Narayani informed Durga about Mahisasura  
Arriving in a chariot, unaccompanied.  
Anticipating attack from his side, Durga got  
Into her *khechari* chariot and flew into the sky.  
On the banks of Ganga they met each other.

Listen, O King! Amazed by Durga's beauty,  
 Mahisasura asked her sternly, "Where did you  
 Come from, hey strange woman? Seducing  
 My friends by sweet words, you took their lives.  
 How treacherous and cruel a woman can be!  
 I'll cook your flesh and eat it. I'll bathe with  
 Your blood and avenge the death of my friends."  
 The Goddess replied in a harsh voice, "O the Foe  
 Of the gods! What right do you have to live  
 After letting all your friends die? O boastful  
 Demon! I'll cut you into pieces. I'll send you  
 To Yama's abode to be eaten by vultures  
 And jackals." Infuriated, Kapilasingha's son  
 Took the bow and shot one thousand arrows  
 At her one thousand hands. At this, Durga  
 Retaliated by firing arrows at him. The demon  
 Sent two thousand arrows, then nine lakhs  
 That covered the sky, but all of those were  
 Burnt down by the glint of her eyes.  
 The exchange of arrows darkened the sky  
 And fell to the ground like the rains of Shravana.

Failing in his attempt to defeat Durga,  
 Mahisasura used the arrows he had received  
 From the gods. First, he fired a *parbata*  
 Arrow which rained down stones and boulders  
 On her chariot. Some of them were one *yojana*  
 Long. In reply, Durga shot a *bajrabali*  
 Arrow that broke the stones into small pieces.  
 Then, she sent the Agni arrow, challenging Mahisa  
 To destroy it. Surprised by her prowess in  
 Archery, Bajrasingha's grandson asked her,

“O great woman! Where did you learn these  
 Wonderful skills from? Never have I seen  
 A woman, such as you, who routed the great  
 Army of mine. Who says women are weaklings?  
 Had I known your attributes earlier, I would  
 Have surrendered to you and learnt many  
 Things from you. Now, listen to me. Be my wife.  
 See, if you kill me, you’ll achieve nothing.  
 But, if I kill you, I’ll be famous in the three  
 Worlds. I swear, I’ll remain faithful to you  
 Forever. Please have mercy on me.” Durga  
 Replied, “You needn’t ask for my mercy.  
 In the battle between the two clans, the gods  
 And the demons, there is least chance of your  
 Survival. I could have saved you hadn’t you been  
 So cruel to the gods. You tormented them, depriving  
 Them of their rights. I’ve no other option than  
 Killing you to restore peace and order in heaven.”

Taking offence, Mahisasura hissed like  
 An angry cobra. Agni arrow sent by her  
 Was destroyed as it reached Dhumralochana.  
 Mahisa shot at her the *Ahi* arrow that stung  
 The Goddess causing immense pain. In response,  
 She fired the *garuda* arrow that swallowed  
 Mahisa’s arrow. Then, she shot the *nirghanta*  
 Arrow which Dhumralochana caught with  
 His left hand. In anger, Mahisasura fired  
 The *megha* arrow that caused a heavy rainfall.  
 Which Durga paid back with *rudra* arrow  
 That stopped the rain. The *Brahma* arrow Durga  
 Shot next was broken into pieces by Dhumralochana.



Annoyed with Dhumralochana's interference,  
 She let out a roar of rage from which  
 Two demonesses, Kankasuni and Lomasuni, were  
 Born. Their upper lips touched the sky and the nether  
 Lips the earth. Durga commanded them,  
 "Swallow Dhumralochana and the Sanchaketu  
 Chariot so that, I can have a full view  
 Of Mahisasura." With folded hands, Kankasuni  
 Said, "I'll take on Dhumralochana." Lomasuni  
 Said, "I'll swallow the chariot." Both flew into  
 The sky and rushed towards Mahisasura  
 Who shot arrows at them to prevent them from  
 Advancing. Kankasuni swallowed the arrows,  
 And, with them, Dhumralochana too. Next  
 She gulped the Sanchaketu chariot. Scared,  
 Mahisasura disappeared from there. With her  
 Divine eyes, Durga discovered him in the sky.  
 Alighting from her chariot, she rode her lion  
 And reached Mahisasura. Seeing her, the demon  
 Launched an attack on her with bow and arrow.  
 The exchange of arrows and jangling of maces  
 Continued, neither side showing any sign  
 Of defeat. The demon's *chakunda* arrow was  
 Destroyed by Durga's *rudra* arrow and his  
*Kalachakra* by the Goddess's *baruna* arrow.  
 When all his weapons were destroyed, Mahisa  
 Changed himself into a huge buffalo, his body  
 Occupying the whole of the Jambu island.  
 The bejewelled buffalo looked as shining as  
 The Udayagiri. The Goddess rained down  
 Arrows on him incessantly, but none of them  
 Could pierce into his body. The buffalo stood

As firm as the Meru mountain, looking radiant.  
 Even Durga's divine weapons did not work.  
 Mahisa, then, charged at the lion with his  
 Horns. Durga told the lion, "You take on  
 The buffalo. I've taken a vow to kill Mahisasura."  
 She struck him with mace and trident again  
 And again, but it was all in vain. She,  
 At last, shot at him the *Kopanala* arrow, the most  
 Fatal of all her weapons. But Mahisa caught  
 It with his left hand. Infuriated, Durga struck  
 His shoulders with a cutlass that severed  
 His head from his body which fell to the  
 Ground. The earth shook violently, as if  
 The Mandaragiri had given way, while the gods  
 Cheered and strew gold on the Goddess.

As the buffalo's head was chopped off,  
 Mahisa came out from inside its body like the sun  
 Rising. He had a *parigha* in his left hand  
 And a dagger in the right. The Goddess struck  
 His chest with a trident, and, standing on him,  
 Pressed one of her feet on his cheek. Soon she was  
 Joined by nine crore Katyayanis, fifty-six crore  
*Pichasunis*, sixty-four *yoginis*, nine *marbhuta*  
*Sronehas*, three *padma* Chandis, fourteen crore  
*Dakinis*, fifty-six crore Chamundis, seven *sagara*  
 Goddesses, some of whom were Ugratara, Chandi,  
 Kothari, Golama, Marakama, Yamakama, Maheswari,  
 Kali, Kankali, Betali, Bhairabi and Kankasuni,  
 Eighteen crore Rudrayanis and fifty-two crore  
 Brahmayanis. All of them pounced on Mahisa.  
 The nine crore Katyayanis sat on his chest,

The sixty-four *yoginis* pushed the trident into  
 His body, the hundred *marbhuta* Kamarupis  
 Held his hands firmly, five *padma dakinis*  
 Held his thighs, one hundred *pichasunis* caught  
 Hold of his body, fifty-six crore goddesses  
 Held Mahisa's four legs and fourteen crore  
 Bhairabis wrung his neck. Thirty-three crore  
 Goddesses ate the flesh from his back  
 And the lion gnawed at his chest.

Incensed, Mahisa shook his body with  
 A jerk that threw the goddesses to far-off  
 Places. One lakh crore fell in Padma island,  
 Fourteen crore Bhairabis in Chandra island,  
 Nine *padma* Chandis in Kusha island, three  
 Hundred crore Chamandis in Karancha island,  
 Hundred *padma pichasunis* in Padma island,  
 Fourteen crore demonesses in the Milky Sea,  
 Nine crore Katyayanis in Jambu island, one  
*Padma dakinis* and sixty-four *yoginis* in  
 The forest who later became forest deities.  
 Durga was left alone, her companions thrown  
 Afar, immobile. Some of them lost their eyes  
 And were maimed, others fractured their  
 Bones. All of them turned to stone wherever  
 They lay. They were worshipped as goddesses  
 Later. Seizing the opportunity, Mahisa slipped into  
 The deep sea. Durga followed him into the deep  
 Sea and pressed his chest with her feet not  
 To let go of him. She knew once he escaped,  
 He would destroy the three worlds. All living beings  
 Would perish. Just then, the voice of Providence

Was heard from above: "Never let him go;  
Hold him down. Once he escapes, he will never  
Be killed. O Merciful Goddess! We pray to you  
Not to let us down." The concern of the gods  
Touched her. She produced a Goddess from her  
Body, who had four hands, four faces and red  
Complexion. She was dressed in white and sitting  
On a lotus, two of her hands were in the pose  
Of blessing. Durga asked her, "I failed to kill  
The demon who is hiding in the sea. Where did  
You come from?" She replied, "I was born  
To you. Don't fret. Once you let go of the demon,  
He'll devour the gods in a moment. O Mother!  
I was inside you. Moved by your bitter agony,  
I came out." Durga told her, "O my daughter!  
I seek your help to finish off Mahisasura."  
Realizing her mother's anxiety, she hurled a snare  
Into the sea and caught him. Then she pulled  
It hard and brought both Durga and the demon  
Ashore. There was a kingdom called Kashi nearby  
Where they laid the demon and held him down.  
But Mahisasura was trying hard to break  
Loose from them and escape into the sky.  
The Goddess, seated on the lotus, told Durga,  
"Listen, mother, to the story of Mahisasura's  
Past. In Satya Yuga, he meditated on Brahma  
For one lakh sixty thousand years. Pleased  
With his devotion, Brahma offered him a boon.  
He told him, 'Grant me the boon that no man  
Can kill me and that I can defeat Vishnu  
In war.' Andhaka, his minister, warned him that  
He might be killed by a woman, if not by man.

Mahisa scolded him for his stupid remark,  
Since he thought women were too weak and too  
Foolish to dare him. The minister insisted,  
'Don't forget that Narayana takes feminine  
Form to kill the demons.' Greatly worried,  
Mahisa begged Brahma, 'In case a woman  
Kills me, bless me that I'll die watching her  
Naked form.' O Mother! You've to prepare  
Yourself accordingly. Unless he sees your  
Genitals, he is not going to die now or ever.  
So, mother, take off your clothes and ensure  
The death of the wicked demon." Bewildered,  
Durga exclaimed, "What a shame to expose  
My nakedness to everyone!" The Goddess, sitting  
On the lotus, told her, "If that's your worry,  
How can the three worlds be saved? That he is  
Still alive is because the secret of his death  
Was not known." Just then, the gods sounded  
Out: "O Durga! What she says is right."  
She reminded Durga, "What about your promise  
To the gods, that you'll destroy the demon?  
If you don't keep your words, you betray  
The gods who relied on you. After you were born,  
You stretched your hands towards them and they  
Equipped you with their weapons. You also took  
A vow to kill the demon. They have been waiting  
Long to see you act. If you disappoint them,  
You'll be blamed. O Mother! The sun may rise  
In the west; the ocean may overflow the north  
Shore, lotuses may bloom on the mountain,  
But great men never falter in their commitment.  
Unable to bear with the humiliations by the demons,

The gods had sought your support.” So saying,  
She bowed at her feet in respect.’

Glory to you, O Katyayani, the Merciful,  
The Protector of mankind! Chanting your name,  
One leads a life, healthy and hearty.  
The Goddess who was born to Durga will remove  
The obstacles in your life. She has no beginning  
Nor end. Think on her; she will bless you with  
Wisdom. Sudramuni Sarala Das owes whatever  
Achievements he has to her.

Shuka said, ‘That Goddess tipped off Durga  
How to kill Mahisasura. It was too difficult  
To hold him back for a long time. Suddenly  
He got up and ran at the speed of the wind.  
The Goddess cautioned Durga, “Take off your  
Clothes and follow him before it is too late.”  
Durga protested, “Isn’t it embarrassing to do  
As you say? How can I commit a sin, the like  
Of which is never seen, nor heard of, for  
The sake of killing a despicable demon?  
Let not the wicked demon die; let the gods  
Be driven away from heaven; let the nine  
Islands of the world be destroyed. But I can’t  
Show my naked body to the three worlds.”

Mahisasura, breaking out of the place,  
Ran on and on until he reached the Kameka  
Forest on the bank of River Tarini.  
Time was running out and the demon was  
Slipping away. Without a second thought,

Durga took the form of Chamunda. She removed  
 All her clothes except a little piece of cloth  
 That covered her genitals. She wore her hair  
 Loose, and her thighs and breasts were bare.

Stunned to see her stark naked,  
 Mahisasura mused, "Bless my soul! I consider  
 It my good fortune to see the rarest of the rare  
 Sight that the gods can never expect to see.  
 As they could not kill me in war, they are now  
 Using a woman as a decoy. This was, of course,  
 What I wished for, otherwise the whole creation  
 Would have been in peril. Didn't I wish to see,  
 The genitals of the woman who would kill me?"  
 He lay on the bank of Tarini river, left  
 Completely drained. Durga stood  
 On him, one of her feet on his chest. His eyes  
 Locked on her genitals, he breathed his last.

Expressing her gratitude to her daughter,  
 Durga said, "I'd given birth to many Chandis,  
 But you're the best of all. I name you as  
 Sarbamangala. You protected the gods from  
 An imminent disaster. You'll also protect  
 The mankind against evils." O Parikshit!  
 Durga asked Ratnagiri to trample Mahisasura's  
 Dead body. Before leaving the place for heaven,  
 She called out to her companions, such as  
 Narayani, Indrayani, Rudrayani, Bhairabi,  
 Brahmayani, Baseli, Chachika, Madhabi, Kali,  
 Kankali, Betali, Ugratara, Samadi, Matangi,  
 Chandika, Tripura, Ramachandi, Nimanjai,

Shyanti, Marakama, Kothari, Ambika, Eloma,  
 Golama, Bhataleka, Kalama, Rupa, Birupa,  
 Shyma, Subhanti, Nisabali, Binjabali,  
 Aniti, Pakheni, Sarangi, Champai, Rupai, Jamai,  
 Barunai, Pichikai, Bahadai, Khudai, Soubhagi,  
 Saudai, Lemua, Kenduasuni, Andhari, Dakeni,  
 Hathibaseni, Sadhebi, Rudhi, Samuka, Sarabinda,  
 Nila, Kamala, Soneha, Makunda, Bhagita,  
 Munita, Utani, Nangana, Khepa, Mekhala,  
 Mahakhala, Ghoti, Bahani, Kamarupi,  
 Chandrama, Juhai, Tripura, Tarini, Sare,  
 Jatuali, Hingula, Charu, Chamandi, Bikala,  
 Bhadrakali, Jakshari, Sagari, Nirakuli,  
 Singhala, Barahi, Anantai, Sara, Dhyateswari,  
 And others, who were four *kharbas*  
 In number. They were accompanied by nine  
 Crore Katyayanis, five *padma pichasunis*,  
 And sixty-four *yoginis*. Durga commanded  
 All of them, "Rush to Jenabati city forthwith  
 And devour the demons and demonesses."  
 At this, the goddesses, like a flock of hawks,  
 Swooped on the city. They consumed the whole  
 Demon population - young and old - leaving  
 No trace of them.

O Parikshit! In the midnight  
 Of Thursday, the eighth day of Ashwin,  
 Mahisasura was killed. Durga was born  
 In the midnight of the bright fortnight  
 Of the eighth day of Ashwin. The same day  
 She arrived in Ratnagiri, riding a lion.  
 Beginning with that day, the battle continued



Until the eighth day of the next fortnight.  
On the ninth day the demon community was  
Completely wiped out.

On her arrival in heaven, the gods,  
Exceedingly happy, worshipped her with  
Many offerings. They requested her to give up  
Her terrible form and return to her former self.  
Lord Shiva, terrified, prayed to her benignly:

“You’re my third eye. My life and death  
Are in your hands. You’re the creator; you’re  
Brahman. The Water, the Fire, the Wind and  
The Sky are your manifestations.  
You’re the source of wisdom,  
The essence of meditation and spiritual  
Knowledge. You’re *siddha*; you’re *sadhu*.  
You’re the cause of sorrow and the redeemer  
Of it. You’re the ultimate goal of every soul.  
You’re the beginning of every thing. O Mother!  
You symbolize the eternal joy. The greatest  
Sages seek your blessings.” So saying, the Lord  
Bowed at her feet in respect.’

Durga is the Saviour and Well-wisher  
Of mankind. She is the eternal flame of hope  
And life. She represents *susumna*.  
She is indestructible; she is Gayatri, she is  
Death incarnate. She protects her devotees  
Against all evils. Thus says Sarala Das,  
Bowling at her lotus-feet.

Sage Shuka told the king:

‘Terrified by the sight of Durga, all the gods  
Made a hasty exit, except Lord Shiva, who,  
Unable to escape, started singing and dancing  
To please her. He was praying to her to save his life  
And to have mercy on him. Seeing him so scared,  
She took pity on him. “I’m pleased with your  
Devotion,” she said, “Tell me what you want.  
I promise to fulfil your wish.” The Lord replied,  
“I know I am not worthy of your mercy. I beg  
You for granting me a long life.” She put one  
Of her hands on his head and blessed him,  
“You’ll be immortal. You may ask for any  
Other boon without fear.” “I pray to you to put  
Your clothes on,” he implored. To which she said,  
“Don’t you know I’ve taken a vow not to cover  
My body?” The Lord, then, said, “I wish to have  
You as my wife.” So saying, he moved past  
Her, but she called after him, asking him to wait.  
She went over and held his hand. Then,  
She put a garland around his neck. She looked  
Into his face and said, “You’re naked, so am I.  
We’re now man and wife.” Delighted, Shiva  
Took her into his lap and held her in deep  
Embrace. He spread his long-matted hair  
Over her that covered her body completely,  
Except for her face that shone like the moon.

Narada reported the whole story to Brahma,  
“The Lord of Beasts and Durga are in love with  
Each other. Pleased with his devotion, she offered  
Him a boon. Shiva asked her to become his wife,

To which she consented. Now, Uma and Maheswar  
 Are united with each other." Hearing this,  
 Brahma, Indra, the Moon, the Sun, the Wind, Baruna  
 And others flocked to her. They bowed at her  
 Lotus-feet and expressed their gratitude to her.  
 When Brahma prayed to her with offerings,  
 She forbade him. Pointing at Sarbamangala,  
 She said, "This Goddess is the one who deserves  
 Your offerings. It is she who saved me from  
 Drowning and caught Mahisa with a snare  
 And brought him ashore. All other goddesses  
 Who had accompanied me were thrown away  
 By Mahisa in different directions. When  
 All my attempts to hold back Mahisa fell through  
 And I was trying hard to prevent him from  
 Escaping, this Goddess revealed to me the secret  
 Of Mahisasura's death. She told me the only way  
 To kill him was to strip off. She brought wind  
 To my sails which helped me to kill the demon.  
 She brought an end to the discontent and gloom  
 That had overtaken the three worlds."

O Parikshit!

I bow to Katyayani, the incarnation of Vishnu,  
 Who fulfils the wishes of one and all. Her  
 Reddish-blue complexion soothes every heart.  
 She is compassionate and merciful. Her glory  
 Is undying. She is the Saviour of mankind.  
 She is Aparna, as powerful as Time and Fire,  
 Who can make and unmake the destiny  
 Of the world. She is incomprehensible, fearless  
 And indomitable. She has no beginning,

Middle nor end. The story of her heroic deeds  
Can never be put to words. How can I, being  
A man, explain it? O the Wise! By worshipping  
Her you can achieve everything in life –  
Wealth, children, good health and security.

O the Wise! In the midnight of Tuesday,  
The eighth day of the bright fortnight of Ashwin,  
The Goddess had arrived in Ratnagiri. On  
The eighth day of the dark fortnight Chanda  
And Munda were killed. The battle lasted for  
Sixteen days. In the night of the fifteenth day  
Mahisasura was slain. On the ninth day  
Of the bright fortnight of Ashwin, the demons  
In Jenabati were wiped out. The next Thursday  
Durga adorned Shiva's lap, which is  
Considered the most auspicious  
Day of the month.'

For Parikshit to be blessed with a son,  
Sage Shuka held a *yajna* from which a child  
Was born. The sage named him Janmejaya.  
The hearing of the scripture bore fruit, it saved  
Parikshit's Moon clan from extinction.  
That was the benefit of listening to Chandika's  
Story. Overwhelmed with joy, the king worshipped  
At the feet of the sage, offering him finery,  
Earrings and a garland of gems. He fell  
At his feet with a pot filled with five crore gems.

O Noble ones!  
Blessed are those who listen to Chandi's story.  
They succeed in life and their sins, like

Water on a lotus leaf, do not affect their life.  
Their fear of the wrath of the royal authority  
Is redeemed and their bodies purified. How can  
I describe her glory whom Brahma, Krupajal  
By name, prays, seeking her blessings?  
She is the one whom Parshurama, Renuka's son,  
Worships by offering blood.

The goddess of Jankherpur will bring  
An end to Kali Yuga herself or through others,  
While she exists for all eternity. I owe all I have  
To her. I'll act as her humble servant all  
My life. I don't know how to chant, worship  
And meditate. It is Sarala Chandi, the benevolent  
Goddess, who imparted the spiritual knowledge  
On me, even though I was mired in ignorance.  
She dictates me what to write  
And I put them into words. O the Wise!  
Forgive me if you find any mistakes.

Thus says Sudramuni Sarala Das,  
The poet, bowing at Sarala Chandi's feet.

## Glossary

Aditya	: the sun
<i>ajagaba</i>	: also Ajanga, Pinaka; Lord Shiva's bow
Alakapuri	: the abode of Kubera, the custodian of wealth in heaven
Amaravati	: the abode of Indra, king of gods
Anakara	: also Nirakara; God
Annapurna	: the benevolent Goddess who provides food for all; Parvati
Aparna	: Parvati; so called as she did not eat anything, not even a leaf ( <i>parna</i> ), during her meditation, to have Shiva as her husband
Ardrabali	: the rainbow
<i>artha</i>	: wealth
<i>bahutia</i>	: an animal of the deer family
Balaram's weapon	: the plough
Baraswatipura	: the abode of Indra
Barunapura	: the abode of Baruna, God of Waters
<i>betala</i>	: (feminine: <i>betali</i> ) the followers of Lord Shiva
<i>bharana</i>	: 80 gaunis, one gauni = 8 seers (approx.)

<i>Bhusandakaka</i>	: Kakkhusundi in Sanskrit; a crow named Bhusanda who was cursed by Sage Lomasa. Anticipating its death, it flew to Sri Jagannath Temple, Puri, where it fell into the Rohinikunda and got salvation by turning into four-armed Vishnu
<i>bimba</i>	: a creeper; its fruit looks shining red when it is ripe
<i>brahmachari</i>	: one who practises continence and studies the Vedas in the preceptor's house after investiture
<i>Brahman</i>	: the ultimate reality underlying all phenomena
<i>brahmarsi</i>	: a brahmin who becomes a sage
<i>brahmasara</i>	: a very powerful and lustrous weapon (arrow); Guru Dronacharya learnt its use from Agasti and taught it to Arjuna and Aswastthama
<i>brunda</i>	: 1,000 crore
<i>chakora</i>	: also <i>chakrobaka</i> ; a bird said to be living on moonlight
<i>chamara</i>	: cowrie; a long brush made of tufts of the tail-hair of an yak, used as a fan or a fly-whisk
<i>chandal</i>	: a low born
<i>Chandi</i>	: Goddess Durga
<i>Dadhibamana</i>	: also Dadhimangala; Vishnu; the <i>Bamana Purana</i> mentions Vishnu carrying curd ( <i>dadhi</i> ) during his incarnation as Bamana (the dwarf)
<i>dakini</i>	: a follower of Goddess Kali

Daksha	: one of Brahma's sons and the progenitor of mankind
<i>dambaru</i>	: a small double-faced drum in the shape of an hour-glass, associated with Lord Shiva
Damodara	: Vishnu
<i>danda</i>	: 24 minutes
<i>dikpalas</i>	: the gods ruling the ten directions. According to Manu, they are Kubera, Indra, Bayu, Yama, Baruna, Agni, the Moon, the Sun, Brahma and Vishnu. The Vedas mention five <i>dikpalas</i> and the Buddhists four
Durga	: the Goddess who killed Mahisasura. The ten forms of Durga are Kali, Tara, Sodashi, Bhubaneswari, Bhairabi, Chhinnamasta, Dhumabati, Bagala, Matangi and Kamala. In <i>Durga Saptasati</i> , they are Shailaputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kusmanda, Skandamata, Katyayani, Kalaratri, Mahagauri and Siddhidatri
<i>gandharvas</i>	: also <i>vidyadharas</i> ; demi-gods, whose wives are called <i>apsaras</i>
<i>gauri</i> and <i>sauri</i>	: a method of cooking in which vegetables are not chopped, nor spices added
Gayatri	: the most powerful Vedic <i>mantra</i> ; the mother of the four Vedas
Girija	: Parvati; so called as she was the daughter of a mountain ( <i>giri</i> ), the Himalayas
Garuda	: a huge mythical bird born to Kashyap and Binata. He was a great Vaishnava and the carrier of Vishnu
<i>garuda</i>	: a weapon resembling a mace



Harivamsa	: <i>Harivamsa Purana</i> written by Vyasa; another Sanskrit version by Jinasena (AD 783) and Odia version by Achyutananda Das
Hemavanta	: the Himalayas
Hemavantapura	: the abode of Lord Shiva
Hiranyagarvapura	: the abode of the Sun
Jambu island	: one of the nine islands in which India is situated
Jatayu	: king of vultures; son of Aruna and Syeni in the <i>Mahabharata</i> and son of Garuda in the <i>Ramayana</i>
Kalapurusa	: the messenger of death; the son of the Sun who has six heads, sixteen hands, twenty-four eyes and six feet. He is dark in complexion and dressed in red
Kama	: God of Love. Some of his other names are Mara, Kandarpa, Manasija, Madana, Pradyumna, Makaradhwaja, Minaketan and Darpaka
<i>kamandalu</i>	: also <i>kamandal</i> ; an oblong-shaped water-pot used by ascetics
Kamyak	: a forest on the banks of River Saraswati; Sage Gautam lived there
Kapila	: son of Sage Kadama and Debahuti; the fifth incarnation of God; the propounder of the Sankhya philosophy
Kartik	: also Karttikeya, Kumara and Skanda; Lord Shiva's son
Kashyap	: so named as he had the complexion of <i>kasha</i> flower; the son of Maruchi and grandson of Brahma; the composer of many <i>shlokas</i> of <i>Rigveda</i>

<i>kharba</i>	: 10,000 crore
<i>khatwang</i>	: a long, studded club used as a weapon
<i>khechhari</i>	: a yogic exercise in which the attention of the <i>yogi</i> is focused on the space between the eyebrows
<i>kinnara</i>	: singers of heaven with bodies of men and heads of horses
<i>konta</i>	: a weapon
<i>kshetrapala</i>	: God worshipped at the border of a place of pilgrimage
<i>kshauni</i>	: 10,00,000×10,000,000 crore
<i>kumkum</i>	: a red cosmetic powder or paste
<i>lita</i>	: 60 <i>lita</i> = 1 <i>danda</i> = 24 seconds
<i>Maheswari</i>	: Durga
<i>Managovinda</i>	: Duryodhana
<i>mandapa</i>	: a platform which is open on all sides; usually attached to a temple
<i>Mandara</i>	: a huge mountain; it was used for churning the sea by the gods and the demons
<i>marbhuta</i>	: 10 crore
<i>Matali</i>	: Lord Indra's charioteer
<i>maya</i>	: illusion
<i>medha</i>	: also <i>madha</i> ; 1 <i>madha</i> = 0.8 grams
<i>Meru</i>	: the Meru mountain of mythological fame; also called Sumeru, Hemadri, Ratnasanu, Amaradri, etc. It is 84,000 <i>yojana</i> in height, of which 16,000 <i>yojana</i> are submerged by the sea. It has three mounts. It finds a mention in the <i>Bhagavata</i> , the <i>Nrisimha Purana</i> and the <i>Kurma Purana</i> . In modern geography, it is the North Pole, located in the Arctic circle

<i>moksha</i>	: salvation
<i>naga</i>	: cobra
Nahusa	: son of King Yayati
Narasimha	: the fourth incarnation of Vishnu who killed Hiranyakashyapa
<i>nauti</i>	: one <i>nauti</i> = 20 <i>gaunis</i>
Oda rastra	: the coastal districts of modern Odisha
<i>padma</i>	: 1 padma=1000000000000
Panchali	: Draupadi of the <i>Mahabharata</i>
<i>parigha</i>	: a weapon
Parikshit	: son of Abhimanyu and grandson of Arjuna, the third Pandava
<i>pichasuni</i>	: followers of Chandi
Prayag	: one of the holiest places in India
Raktabirjya	: Raktabija in Sanskrit
<i>sagara</i>	: 1 sagara = 10000000000000
Sampad	: also Sampati; Aruna's son and Jatayu's elder brother
Sanaka	: Brahma's son
Sanjibanipura	: the abode of Yama, King of Death
Shuka	: son of Vyasa and grandson of Parasara
<i>sroneha</i>	: bloodthirsty demi-goddesses
Sudramuni	: a saint among the sudras
Suravi	: the cow-Goddess; three primary <i>nadis</i> (channels of energy) of the human body related to yogic exercises
<i>swayambara</i>	: a form of marriage in which the bride chooses her husband from among the assembled suitors
<i>tala</i>	: length equal to a man's height
<i>tandaba</i>	: a terrible dance form performed by Shiva (Nagaraj), which brings destruction

<i>tulsi</i>	: basil plant
<i>uluka vidya</i>	: the art of making oneself invisible or taking various forms
<i>Vishnu Purana</i>	: written by Sage Parasara; it has 23,000 <i>shlokas</i> and it deals with the genesis
<i>yajna</i>	: sacrificial rites as enjoined by the Vedas
<i>Yashobantipura</i>	: the abode of Brahma
<i>yojana</i>	: 8 miles approximately